

someone else's dream

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by [bonesandthebees \(bonesandcacti\)](#)

Summary

"I just don't get why we're trying something this risky!" Tommy exclaimed. "The Pythia is, like, the most important person in the whole palace besides the king. They're gonna be guarded to all hell and back."

"And that's why you're gonna be wearing a guard's uniform," Phil reminded him, adjusting the wings on his lap. "Plus, it's literally a masquerade ball. The Pythia won't be able to recognize you're not one of their guards. All you have to do is tell them you're taking them to a safe location when me and Techno start our distraction, and once you get them in private, use your magic to make them follow you out."

...

"Look, like I said, I don't want to hurt you, Wilbur," Tommy said, taking a step closer to him, not reacting when Wilbur stepped back again. "Plus, are you even happy here?"

"It doesn't matter whether I'm happy or not. Clara chose me for this role, and I'm not going to go against Her will," Wilbur said, although the words tasted like dirt on his tongue.

or, Tommy tries to kidnap an oracle, but things don't go exactly according to plan.

NOW BEING REWRITTEN + CONTINUED

Notes

okay so like... I have no idea how to explain this au it's such a complex one

basically about a month ago I got the urge to write something with a masquerade ball, but I don't usually like plain royalty aus. Then I was like 'what about cyberpunk royalty' and that was closer, and then I remembered I've been wanting to combine cyberpunk and urban fantasy together FOREVER, so I threw that into the mix too. I have so much random worldbuilding for this au, but I like to think it's a really fun time!

hope you guys enjoy!

of your eyes, begonia skies

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Phil, are you sure this is a good idea?”

It was dark in the room. Night had fallen long ago, and the only light to see by at the moment was coming from the holo-map spread over the table Tommy was leaning against. He was using his right hand to fiddle with his left hand, eyeing the way the runes carved into the metal faintly glowed in the gloom. He had been in this room for too long. His prosthetic always started to ache with phantom pain when he was hunched over maps like this for hours on end.

There was a faint squeaking coming from the corner of the room, the smell of oil heavy in the air as Phil messed with his wings. Apparently the gears had been getting stuck lately, so Phil was re-oiling them to make sure they were ready for tomorrow.

Meanwhile, Techno was leaning back in his chair, eyes closed like he was asleep. Tommy knew he wasn't. If he was actually sleeping, he'd be snoring up a storm because he was one of the loudest sleepers Tommy had ever met. But instead his breathing was silent, and Tommy could see the sigil tattoo on his neck glowing a faint red—which told Tommy he was awake.

On the outside, it looked like a peaceful scene. But the room itself felt heavy as Tommy's tired eyes skimmed over the holo-map for the thousandth time.

“Mate, trust me, I wouldn't pull something like this if I didn't know what I was doing,” Phil reassured him, not looking up from his wings. “Just make sure to memorize that map. You won't have any signal in the palace, so you'll need to know every possible escape route you can take.”

Groaning, Tommy slumped back down in his chair, dragging his hands through his hair. “That's what I've been fucking doing for the past two hours.”

“Can you draw the entire thing from memory yet?” Phil asked, raising an eyebrow.

Tommy was quiet. After a beat, Phil laughed.

“That's what I thought.”

Silence fell over the group again. The squeaking echoed off the walls, and Tommy squeezed his eyes shut, trying to picture the map behind his eyes. Stupid vision fatigue. If he had cybernetic eyes he wouldn't be having this issue, but according to Sam it was ‘too risky’ of a surgery to do if he didn't actually need it. As if hundreds of people didn't get eye implants for the hell of it every day.

Opening his eyes, he skimmed over the map again. The dread that had been pooling in his stomach since Techno told him about the plan a few days ago sat inside of him like the oil Phil was using for his wings. Heavy, ever present, and impossible to get out.

“I just don’t get why we’re trying something this risky!” Tommy exclaimed, a loud *thunk!* echoing out as his metal hand connected with the table. “The Pythia is, like, the most important person in the whole palace besides the king. They’re gonna be guarded to all hell and back.”

“And that’s why you’re gonna be wearing a guard’s uniform,” Phil reminded him, adjusting the wings on his lap. “Plus, it’s literally a masquerade ball. The Pythia won’t be able to recognize you’re not one of their guards. All you have to do is tell them you’re taking them to a safe location when me and Techno start our distraction, and once you get them in private, use your magic to make them follow you out.”

“You say that like it’s easy,” Tommy huffed, leaning back in his seat.

“Tommy, c’mon, you love to brag about how good you are at your magic,” Techno chimed in, his eyes still closed.

“Well- yeah, I know, but it’s just- it’s different when I know how much pressure I’m gonna be under!” Tommy argued. “If I fuck up, I’m gonna get arrested and get thrown into Pandora’s Box!”

“You won’t get thrown in Pandora’s Box,” Phil reassured him. “I told you, I have a friend in the guard there. It’s how we’re gonna get into the palace in the first place. If you get caught, Techno and I will come get you out.”

“You can’t promise me that,” Tommy pointed out, scowling at the man. “You’re not the Pythia. You can’t see the future.”

Sighing, Phil finally looked up from his wings, his faded blue eyes meeting Tommy’s across the room. “That’s why you also have the cyanide pill. If the worst comes to worst, you’ll return to the arms of Our Lady.”

Tommy knew that was supposed to be reassuring. He worshipped their Lady just like the rest of them. As a Deathling, he was supposed to be happy at the prospect of fulfilling his purpose and returning to Her cool embrace.

But... he wasn’t sure if he was ready to die yet. Sure, it wouldn’t be bad, but there was still so much he wanted to do while he was alive.

“Just follow the plan, and nothing will go wrong,” Techno said after a few moments of silence. “If things really go to hell, ditch the Pythia. Your safety is more important than anything else.”

And that’s what made Tommy deflate. He slumped down in his chair again, shame already creeping up his throat at the idea of coming back to the Church by himself. With nothing to

show for how much they sacrificed to make this plan work. He would almost rather meet his Lady than deal with the embarrassment of everyone seeing that he failed.

“I’m not gonna ditch the Pythia,” Tommy grumbled, bringing his knees up to his chest. “I’ll carry that fucking bastard out of the palace if I have to.”

Phil chuckled at that. “What if they’re too heavy for you to carry?”

Tommy made an indignant noise. “There’s no way! I’m the Biggest Man around! I’ll be able to carry them no problem!”

“Alright Big Man,” Techno drawled, his eye roll obvious in his tone despite still looking like he was sleeping. “Now, pop quiz time, do you remember how you’re going to identify the Pythia?”

Now this was easy.

“They’re gonna be the one wearing all the fancy clothes,” Tommy shrugged.

“It’s a masquerade ball that’s being hosted by King Dream himself. Everyone’s going to be wearing fancy clothes. Be specific. What is the Pythia going to be wearing?” Techno pushed.

Groaning again, Tommy struggled to remember what he’d been told. “They’ll be wearing a lot of flowy clothing, right? And be dressed in only white and gold?”

“They’ll also have a veil over their head made of a gauzy, white fabric,” Techno added. “It probably won’t cover their face, but it’ll rest over their hair. You also won’t be able to see their eyes. We don’t know exactly what kind of mask they’ll be wearing, but it won’t show their eyes. So keep an eye out for both those things.”

“Veil and no eyes. Got it,” Tommy muttered, trying to commit that to memory. “Do we know anything else about them? Like, how tall they are? What color their hair is?”

“Tommy, if we knew that we wouldn’t be drilling you on their clothing,” Phil explained. “We only know the traditional garb for the Pythia, and that’s only through word of mouth since it’s been kept secret for so long. Very few people are allowed to see the Pythia, which is why them attending an event like this is an opportunity we can’t afford to waste.”

“Yeah yeah, you mentioned it before,” Tommy muttered, shaking his head. “Just wanted to make sure there wasn’t anything you were leaving out.”

“There’s not. Now hurry up and finish memorizing that map so we can go to sleep,” Techno said, his voice clipped with impatience.

Groaning, Tommy rolled his eyes as he turned back to the map to focus on memorizing the layout, and the squeaking of the metal wings echoed around the room once more.



Wilbur’s dreams always came in flashes.

Colors. Colors everywhere.

Masks of all different shades and shapes moving in one motion, the crowd dancing like it was one living being on its own.

Laughter in his ears. The taste of wine on his tongue. The weight of hundreds of eyes staring at him.

A loud slamming sound.

Screaming. Panic. Guests trying to shove past one another, only to meet closed doors.

Two men. One wearing a black mask reminiscent to that of a bird. The other wearing bones—the jaw of some giant animal tied around the lower half of his mouth.

An outstretched hand. It was a prosthetic made of carved netherite, the deep purple metal intricately carved with swirling designs of gorgeous flowers, while runes were embedded into the metal and glowing a faint blue color.

Wilbur saw himself placing his own hand into the prosthetic one.

Eyes flickering open, Wilbur was greeted with the sight of the gauzy canopy draped over his bed frame.

His head was pounding and his mouth felt like it had been stuffed with cotton. A common set of symptoms whenever he had vision dreams.

Sitting up in the bed, Wilbur blindly reached for the glass of water on his nightstand. He took a long swig of the cool liquid, sighing as it washed out the strange taste in his mouth. Then, he set the glass down and fumbled for his tablet to write down what he saw before it slipped from his mind.

He scribbled down a few vague notes, trying to think over the flashes he'd seen to make sure he didn't miss any details. Something was going to happen at the masquerade ball tonight. Something bad. But what was it exactly? Who were the two men talking to the crowd? Whose hand did he take?

Wilbur thought back to that hand, eyes narrowing as he remembered the beautiful designs on the prosthetic. Craftsmanship like that was hard to find these days. A hand like that wouldn't be easily mistakable.

The prosthetic hand flashed in his mind's eye again, and Wilbur realized there was another detail he hadn't registered until now.

He could see part of the person's arm as well. The place where flesh met netherite in a smooth line, the magic imbued with the prosthetic clearly keeping away any major scarring. But that wasn't what Wilbur was focused on.

There was a symbol on the flesh part of the arm. Sitting right above the place where metal met skin, Wilbur could see a tattoo—a pair of black wings, reminiscent of an angel's.

Holy shit. He knew what that tattoo symbolized.

Pushing back the covers of his bed, Wilbur nearly fell onto the ground as he rushed over to the intercom sitting on the wall next to his door. He pressed the button, listening to it buzz, and then waited.

Only a few seconds later, a staticky voice patched through. "How may I serve you, Pythia?"

"Contact King Dream and tell him to come to my room right away," Wilbur ordered, the tattoo flashing over and over again in his head. "I've received an urgent vision."

"We'll alert him immediately. May Clara bless you."

"May Clara bless you as well," Wilbur replied, before the line went dead.

Breathing a sigh of relief, Wilbur slumped against the door and dragged his hands down his face. The first part of his job was done. Now he could only hope Dream would actually listen to his warning.

Not like he ever really did, but hey, first time for anything, right?

Wilbur spent a few seconds slumped against the door, trying to push his heart down from his throat. The anxiety was buzzing in his chest like an electric livewire, but although he wanted to just stay curled up against the door until Dream arrived, he knew he had to get up and prepare himself before there was any knock at his door.

Forcing himself to his feet, he rushed to the bathroom. Marble counters glittered in the sunlight that poured through the open window, but Wilbur didn't bother looking outside to see what a beautiful day it was. Instead, he turned on the faucet and splashed some water on his face to wake himself up.

After patting his face dry with a towel, he looked into the mirror. His dark brown eyes met his reflection, and he almost flinched back on instinct. Distantly, he wondered when his own eyes had become so unfamiliar to even himself.

He wasn't quite sure. It had been years since he'd gone more than a few hours without his eyes hidden.

Shaking the thoughts away, Wilbur reached into his bathroom drawer to pull out one of his blindfolds. It wasn't a formal one, but Dream would be here any second and he needed to cover his face before the king arrived. Anything would work.

The swath of glittering white fabric looked like nothing more than a regular blindfold, but every blindfold he owned was enchanted so he could still see out of it. He quickly tied it around the back of his head, slumping in relief when he looked at his reflection again, and didn't see his eyes staring back at him.

Now with the urgent matter out of the way, Wilbur trudged back into his room, dropping on the edge of his bed with his hands folded in front of him. All he had to do now was wait.

And wait.

And wait.

It turned out Wilbur's rushing had been for nothing. Because it took nearly ten minutes for his intercom to buzz again. Wilbur had been occupying himself by trying to sketch out the prosthetic hand he'd seen, but hadn't gotten very far by the time the king arrived.

Putting his tablet to the side, Wilbur got up and pressed the button on the intercom again.

"Pythia, the king has arrived. Shall I send him up?"

"Yes, I'm ready for him," Wilbur answered back.

Stepping back, Wilbur settled himself on the edge of his bed again, wringing his hands in front of him as he listened to the footsteps outside his door.

Then, there was a soft knocking.

"Come in."

The door creaked open, and Wilbur dipped his head in respect as Dream entered the room. As always, the King's face was hidden behind his porcelain smiling mask, but from the way his shoulders were tensed Wilbur could tell he wasn't happy about being summoned so abruptly.

"Pythia," Dream greeted, dipping his head in the same manner Wilbur had his own head bowed. They both looked up at the same time, and Dream cocked his head when he noticed Wilbur's state. "You look like you've just woken up."

"That's because I have," Wilbur told him, resisting the urge to frown at the disapproval in Dream's tone. "I had another dream and thought you should know right away."

"Alright then," Dream said, shutting the door behind him and leaning against the wall. "Lay it on me. What's going on?"

"It's about the masquerade tonight. Something bad is going to happen there," Wilbur explained, the screams echoing in his ears.

"Bad in what way?"

"I'm not sure," Wilbur admitted, ducking his head again. "There was screaming, and I saw two unfamiliar men standing at the front of the room, addressing the crowd."

Dream huffed at this. "Is that all?"

Wilbur fought back the urge to grit his teeth. "No, that's not all. I saw the mark of the Deathlings as well."

Now this made Dream stiffen. "Deathlings? Are you sure?"

“Of course I’m sure,” Wilbur snapped, “I’m well-aware of what the mark looks like. I wouldn’t have called you in here if I wasn’t certain.”

Folding his arms over his chest, Dream let out a breath and was silent for a moment. Wilbur didn’t move from his seat, resisting the urge to mess with the blindfold as he waited for Dream to respond.

“So what do you propose we do?” Dream asked finally.

That was an easy one.

“We need to cancel the ball tonight,” Wilbur told him. “Clearly, the Deathlings are planning something for it. The only way to ensure they don’t succeed is to cancel it outright.”

“*Cancel* it? Are you crazy?” Dream scoffed, arms dropping as he pushed off the wall. “We’ve been planning this ball for months. Ambassadors from other countries have traveled a long way to come here for this. We can’t just cancel now!”

“Your Majesty, it’s the Deathlings. We haven’t seen anything from the Deathlings in years,” Wilbur said, silently pleading with Dream to understand his desperation. “If they’re coming out of the shadows for this, that has to be because they have something big planned.”

“So we just up the security at the ball. I don’t see why we have to cancel the event entirely,” Dream said, shaking his head. “If we cancel it outright, the Deathlings will be able to figure out it’s because you received a vision about them, and then they’ll know we’re scared of them.”

“I mean, aren’t we scared of them?” Wilbur asked, frowning under his blindfold.

Dream scoffed again. “No, we’re not scared of a few fanatic cultists.”

Wilbur wasn’t sure if he’d brush the Deathlings off as just ‘fanatic cultists’, but he knew pointing that out would just annoy Dream more.

“So what is your plan then?” Wilbur asked, trying to keep the exasperation out of his voice.

“Like I said, we’ll up the security. Extra guard posts, more protection sigils, the works.”

Something in the back of Wilbur’s mind was telling him that wasn’t going to be enough. That the Deathlings were going to get through no matter what.

“I don’t like it,” Wilbur muttered.

“Pythia, you know I hold your counsel in the highest regard. But at the end of the day, I’m the king, not you,” Dream reminded him, bending down so they were face to face. “It’d do you good to remember that.”

Wilbur gulped. The veiled threat in his words was easy to hear.

“Of course, Your Majesty,” Wilbur forced out between his teeth. “I meant no disrespect.”

Dream considered him for a moment, and a part of Wilbur wished he'd grabbed his veil so Dream wouldn't be able to see the fear on his face.

"Good," Dream said after a beat that was just a second too long. "If that's all you had to tell me, then I'll be taking my leave. Make sure to be ready for the ball tonight. Servants should be coming up soon with your clothing."

Bitterness rose up in Wilbur's throat like bile. The glittering fabrics and gold jewelry they would lay over him so he could be shown off like a prized possession—Dream wanted to make sure he would be all dressed up and ready to be a bragging point. That's all he was to Dream. A precious gem to show off. He hated it.

"I'll be ready," Wilbur told Dream, bowing his head again.

"Then I'll see you tonight."

And with that, Dream left the room again, the door shutting behind him with an audible *click!*

As soon as he was alone, Wilbur grabbed a pillow off his bed. Shoving his face into the silky fabric, he screamed as loud as he could, his voice muffled by the cushion.

What the hell was the point of having an advisor who could see the future if you never took their advice? Wilbur would never understand Dream's thought process with that.

It was days like this that made him miss King XD. Yes, he was a cruel man who berated the courts and held very little sympathy for common folk. But at least he took Wilbur's advice to heart. At least he recognized the gift of the visions Clara would send him, and knew it was foolish to ignore the warnings of the gods. At least with King XD, Wilbur had a purpose.

But now he was just a pretty statue for Dream to brag about. For Dream to layer in gold and jewels and remind him he was the vessel for Clara, but nothing more.

Dread wrapped around his chest like a vice. The Deathlings were going to crash the ball, and something very bad was going to happen as a result. But Dream didn't care. Dream didn't want to waste the opportunity to brag about how great his country was to the ambassadors. Dream would never waste a chance to boost his own ego.

But there was nothing Wilbur could do. He was a canary in a gilded cage, singing his prophecies with no one around to listen.

There was a knock at the door, and a faint voice calling out that it was his breakfast.

Sighing, Wilbur shoved down the frustration bubbling up inside of him, and prepared to start his day.



The ball was stifling, just as Wilbur had figured it was going to be.

The gold mask covering his eyes was heavier than Wilbur had expected it to be. Although he'd worn metal blind masks plenty of times before, this one was one of the most ornate he'd been given, no doubt because Dream wanted to show off.

Again, the mask was enchanted so Wilbur could see through it, but that didn't mean it was as if it wasn't there. Using enchantments to see through his blindfolds always made his vision just the tiniest bit fuzzy, the magic settling like a thin, glittering film over his eyes.

Along with that, his outfit wasn't the most convenient to move around in either. Of course the flowy fabric and gold embroidery was beautiful to look at, but there was so much extra fabric that it was a miracle he hadn't tripped over himself yet. Not to mention, the gauzy veil draped over his hair kept falling off, and he'd wished the servants had pinned it into place so he didn't have to keep adjusting it.

But of course, he was just focusing on how much his outfit annoyed him so he could distract himself from the bigger issue at hand. The invisible clock ticking in his head, waiting for the moment the Deathlings were going to make their move.

So far, everything seemed normal at the ball. Men and women draped in expensive fabrics fluttered between one another, cybernetic enhancements casting a soft light on the crystalline champagne glasses they held in their hands. All of them were donning intricate masks carved of leather and metal—some buzzing with the hum of electricity, others decorated with glowing runes. At one point, a woman had walked by with half of her face looking as though it were made of gold, and Wilbur couldn't tell if it had been a mask or an actual cybernetic enhancement.

Dream looked just as regal as ever. He had switched out his plain porcelain smiling mask for one where the eyes and smile had been inlaid with gold, and he was wearing his formal dark green military jacket—also decorated with gold. Despite Wilbur's warning, he seemed completely at ease in the crowds, laughing and chatting with the guests like he didn't have a single care in the world.

Bringing his own drink up to his lips, Wilbur sighed at the sweet champagne bubbling along his tongue. Then, he noticed Dream pushing through the crowd with some rich person he didn't recognize, and he bit back a sigh as he pushed to his feet to greet this new person.

"Your Majesty," Wilbur said, dipping his head to Dream in respect.

"Pythia, I wanted to introduce you to a friend of mine," Dream began, as if he hadn't already done this five other times so far. "This is King Eret of Angia. Eret, this is The Pythia."

King Eret was dressed just as opulently as the rest of them. They wore a gold mask decorated with carvings of snakes and leaves over their eyes, with an even more intricate golden crown sitting atop dark curls. Their eyes themselves were pure white—no iris, pupil, or anything—and Wilbur wondered if that was natural or if it was a cosmetic thing.

Their gown was deep red, and made of gorgeous billowing chiffon. Looking down, Wilbur noticed the snake tattoos along both their arms that glowed a bright shade of silver, and he

wondered what snakes symbolized in their country considering so much of their outfit revolved around them.

“It is an honor to meet you, Pythia,” Eret said, bowing their head.

“Honor to meet you as well,” Wilbur replied in turn, as he was supposed to.

Eret smiled. “I’ve heard so many different things about The Pythia, sometimes it’s difficult to figure out what’s true or not.”

Dream had already edged away from the conversation, which meant that now Wilbur had to keep Eret busy until he returned. That had obviously been his plan, to bring the other monarch over and dump them on Wilbur so he could run off to speak with other people without coming off as rude.

“If you have any questions, you’re welcome to pose them,” Wilbur said, fighting to keep his smile looking genuine even as annoyance flashed through him. It wasn’t Eret’s fault Dream had ditched them with his ~~prize~~ advisor. Wilbur knew he needed to be as polite as possible, and Eret hadn’t gawked at him yet, so that was a plus.

“If you don’t mind my asking, I am curious about one thing,” Eret began, folding their hands together. “The visions you receive from Clara—how clear are they? Can you see an entire day unfold in your dreams? Or is it something more vague?”

Oh.

Oh.

The snake symbolism Eret was entrenched in seemed painfully fitting. While on the surface a question like that would seem completely innocent, when it was coming from the mouth of the monarch of a nearby country, it had to have more weight behind it than just plain curiosity.

Wilbur wasn’t a politician, but he had been The Pythia for nearly a decade now. He had learned how questions like these were more akin to daggers hidden in dress folds than anything else. Eret wanted to know how clear Wilbur’s visions were so that they could figure out how prepared Essempi was for any future moves Angia might take.

Unfortunately for Eret, Wilbur could wrap daggers in lace with his words as well.

“It can depend. Sometimes Clara will send me vague flashes and I have to interpret the meaning behind them myself, but other times Clara might send me a very clear warning for something that will happen months, sometimes even years into the future. That is, if she deems it important enough.”

That was only half true. While Wilbur certainly had received visions that didn’t come true for several months, he’d never received one that was a year or more out. But Eret didn’t need to know that.

Eret blinked, looking taken aback. “Years?”

“Yes, years. So that we can have adequate time to prepare for any drastic circumstances that might arise,” Wilbur said, and even though Eret couldn’t see his eyes behind his mask, he met that pure white gaze all the same.

“That is... very good to know,” Eret hummed, stepping back from Wilbur. “Thank you for explaining that to me, Pythia. I have other people to attend to, but it was a pleasure meeting you.”

And with that, they hurried back into the crowd, and Wilbur was left alone once more.

Well, he wasn’t alone. His guards were surrounding him like always, the black uniforms they wore making them stand out like a funeral procession in the sea of bright colors. It would’ve been jarring almost to see the contrast between the guards and the guests, but Dream had figured that since it was a masquerade ball, it was only fitting for the guards to fit the theme as well.

Every guard was wearing a masquerade mask of their choosing. Some had opted for plain masks that covered their eyes, while some had gone for masks of wolves, ravens, intimidating creatures like that.

Even with his guards surrounding him though, Wilbur couldn’t help the anxiety that was humming in his chest. The conversation with Eret had taken his mind off his vision, but now he couldn’t help but hear the echoing screams in his ears once more.

It was only a matter of time. These were Deathlings. They weren’t going to be deterred by something as simple as an increase in security.

Then, because apparently the universe had a twisted sense of humor for timing, the lights were cut and the ballroom was plunged into darkness.

There was the sound of glass shattering, and Wilbur heard a woman shriek.

“What’s going on?!”

“Is this part of the ball?”

Voices began to ring out in a panic. There was the sound of more glass breaking, followed by a few more screams. Then, the lights came back on.

Wilbur immediately looked to the front of the room, knowing exactly what he’d see there. Just like in his dream, the man in the bird mask and the man with the skull mask were standing in front of the crowds.

The bird man had a giant pair of metal wings hanging off of his shoulders, while the skull-wearing man held a long, glowing sword in his hands. Glancing to the left, Wilbur could see one of the giant windows that had stretched nearly from the floor to the ceiling was shattered entirely, and figured that was how they came in.

People were already running for the exits. Wilbur felt himself get shoved into the crowd, and he yelped out loud, struggling to fight to get back to his guards. Partygoers were running for

the doors, but they had all been slammed shut, and Wilbur could see people struggling to push them open with little success.

Suddenly, a voice rang out over the crowd.

“QUIET!”

At first, no one listened to the order. Then, a gunshot echoed off the walls, and all the screaming voices fell dead silent.

“That wasn’t hard, now was it?” The bird man asked, his eyes scanning the guests. “We’re not here to hurt you. We simply have a bit of an... announcement to make.”

”Who are you?!” A voice shouted from the crowd.

The bird man chuckled. “Names don’t really matter here, but you can call me the Bird, and my companion here the Boar.”

Wilbur’s head whipped around, searching the crowd for any sign of Dream. Did he regret not listening to Wilbur now? Maybe it was petty, but Wilbur was desperate to catch a glimpse of that smiling mask, to give him a knowing look so Dream understood his mistake in not taking Wilbur’s counsel.

“Pythia,” a voice suddenly whispered in his ear.

Turning his head, Wilbur saw one of his guards leaning close to him. He was dressed in the same uniform as the rest of his guards, and was wearing a silver rabbit mask that covered the upper half of his face. Bright blue eyes peered at Wilbur through the mask, and he wondered if this was one of the new guards added to his rotation as part of Dream’s ‘beefed up security’.

“Yes?” Wilbur asked, dropping his voice to match the guard’s.

“I need to get you out of here while they’re distracted,” the guard explained, jerking his head to the front where the Bird and the Boar were talking again. “Keep your head down and follow me.”

Before Wilbur could stop to think about if that was a good idea, the guard was grabbing his arm and tugging him through the crowd. The other guards didn’t react, and Wilbur figured this was part of their plan. The rest were going to stay to pretend they were still protecting him, while the one guard snuck him out.

It was a smart plan, Wilbur had to admit. As long as no one noticed them leaving.

He did his best to keep his head down, although it was hard since he was taller than most of the people in the crowd. There were a few odd glances thrown his way by the other guests, but everyone seemed to understand the need for him to get out quietly, and most just gave him knowing looks as they turned back to face the two Deathlings at the front of the room.

At one point, Wilbur brushed past a pale shoulder, and met Eret’s white eyes once again.

“Pythia, what-”

Wilbur held up a finger to his mouth, and Eret immediately got the hint. In the heels they wore, they were the same height as him, and they quickly stepped in front of him to help block the view of him from the front.

Huh. Maybe Wilbur had gotten the wrong impression of them.

Soon they reached the far corner of the ballroom. There were large, velvet drapes that hung from the ceiling, and the guard tugged one of them aside to reveal a door embedded in the wall.

The guard took one more glance around to make sure they hadn't been noticed. Thankfully, most people's attention was still held by the Deathlings, and the guard pushed the door open with a soft click and pulled Wilbur through.

As soon as the door clicked shut behind them, Wilbur breathed a sigh of relief and slumped against the wall. Looking around the new room they had entered, Wilbur could see a dark hallway lit up by LED strips along the floor.

“What is this place?” Wilbur asked, glancing around.

“Servant hallway,” the guard explained, holding onto his wrist and pulling him off the wall. Like he was some kind of pet to be dragged around. “We gotta keep moving though. Someone else could come through any second now.”

“Wait, where are we going?” Wilbur pulled his wrist out of the guard's hand, getting annoyed at being yanked.

“To a safe location,” the guard said, sounding annoyed. “Now are you gonna keep asking questions, or can we hurry the fuck up?”

Wilbur narrowed his eyes, even though the guard couldn't see his eyes with his mask. “What safe location? Is it the bunker?”

The guard huffed. “Yes, the fucking bunker. Now hurry-”

“Which bunker?” Wilbur pushed, his gut kicking in to scream at him that something was wrong.

The guard faltered at that. “What do you mean which bunker?”

Alarm bells were now going on in Wilbur's head, and he took a step back from the guard.

“There are several bunkers for emergency situations, located in different parts of the palace. Which one are you taking me to?” Wilbur asked, his heart starting to pound.

There was a second of silence.

Then two.

Then three.

It was taking too long for the guard to answer the question. Far too long. All of the guards throughout the palace were made to memorize the locations of the different bunkers, and each one had its own code name.

Since this guard couldn't seem to answer the question, that could only mean one thing.

This wasn't an actual guard.

Wilbur stumbled back at the realization, hand blindly hitting the wall behind him to try and find the door that had just come into the hallway through. The fake guard noticed Wilbur's panic and rushed forward, and Wilbur yelped as he came close.

"Stay away from me!" Wilbur shouted, trying to shove the fake guard back. "Don't fucking-"

"Calm the fuck down!" The fake guard yelled back, slamming Wilbur against the wall and pinning him with an arm under his throat.

Wilbur struggled under the arm, bringing a hand up to smack the side of the guard's head. But before his hand could land, the fake guard was pressing a hand to Wilbur's chest, and Wilbur felt everything slow.

The fear that had been racing through his body, turning his veins to ice as his heart pounded in his chest, seemed to wash away in the span of a second. His heart rate slowed, and Wilbur involuntarily felt himself slump against the wall.

This... This was wrong. He was supposed to be freaking out, but it was like he physically couldn't panic. Why couldn't he panic?

Not only was his body not physically panicking, but Wilbur's thoughts began to slow as well. The longer the fake guard had his hand pressed to Wilbur's chest, the more his heart beat slowed, thumping in his ears like a steady metronome.

The last of his strength gave out as his muscles turned to jelly. He would've fallen if it weren't for the fake guard grabbing him under his arms, keeping him upright as he slung Wilbur's arm over his shoulders.

"Wh-What did you do to me?" Wilbur asked, voice slurring as his head drooped.

"Just made you chill the hell out so you didn't start screamin' or some shit," the fake guard explained, still keeping one of his hands pressed to Wilbur's chest.

Wilbur blinked a few times, realizing it was getting difficult to keep his eyes open. They were moving now, and Wilbur barely even noticed as the fake guard started leading him down the servant hallway. "How?"

"How do you think, dipshit? It's magic," the fake guard scoffed and- wow, even when he was completely out of his wits, he was still surprised at how rude this guy seemed to be.

“You shouldn’t talk to me like that,” Wilbur mumbled, stumbling over his feet again as the fake guard dragged him down a split in the hallway. He should probably be trying to remember where they were going, but he was so tired. And why did he need to remember that anyway? He wasn’t scared-

Well, he should be. He should be terrified right now because he was- he was being kidnapped and...

God he was tired.

The fake guard snorted. “Oh sorry O High and Mighty Pythia, didn’t realize I was getting rated for my politeness.”

Wilbur chuckled at that. This guy was funny.

“M gonna leave you a one star review,” Wilbur said, blinking a few times as he fought to keep his eyes open. “Kidnapper was rude to me. Horrible time overall.”

The fake guard’s laugh at this was much louder now, and sounded surprisingly genuine. “Oh no, my business will be in shambles! Whatever will I-” He was cut off by the sound of footsteps racing down the hallway ahead of them.

The hallway was long, and the LED lights only lit up the floor but little else. It was impossible for Wilbur to see who was ahead of them, or how far away they were.

Cursing under his breath, the fake guard whipped his head from side to side, clearly trying to figure out where to go. Slowly, Wilbur felt his heart rate pick back up, although it was a struggle against the fog that was weighing on him like a blanket.

Suddenly, Wilbur was being tugged to the left. The fake guard yanked him into a small closet he hadn’t noticed before, pressing him against the shelves and squeezing himself in there with him, before pulling the door shut.

Before Wilbur could really get his bearings, the fog got heavy again. There was... There was some connection between that. The guard was distracted, and the fog got lighter. That was something Wilbur should... he could use it somehow. Maybe.

He was a little too out of it to really be able to think on that clearly right then.

Wilbur slumped against the not-guard as footsteps passed by outside the door. In the back of Wilbur’s head, there was a small voice screaming at him that he needed to make noise. He needed to shove the fake guard away from him, and yell for help.

But he was just so tired. His heart pounding slowly in his ears drowned out nearly everything else, and it was taking him enough energy to just keep his eyes open.

Eternity passed in those thirty seconds. The fake guard was panting, and Wilbur could see his eyes were wide behind the holes in his rabbit mask. He was nervous.

Once the footsteps outside the door fell silent, the fake guard straightened up. He opened the door to the closet, peeking his head out, before he opened it up wider and tugged Wilbur back into the hallway.

The LED strips on the floor gave everything a pale, blue glow. Wilbur tried to focus on that, and not on the way the lights were casting hazy stripes over his vision as he stumbled along beside his kidnapper.

“Where’re we going?” Wilbur asked after they had been walking for a few more minutes, half-draped over the fake guard at this point.

“There’s a window a bit further down. It drops on top of the fence that surrounds the palace, and we can hop off the side of that where my bike is waiting,” the fake guard explained to him, and Wilbur distantly wondered if all kidnappers were so chatty about their plans with their victims.

The fake guard didn’t let his hand off of Wilbur’s chest for the rest of the walk down the twisting hallways. Despite the fog smothering his thoughts, Wilbur did his best to try and think of how he could get out of this situation. It seemed like his kidnapper needed to be focused to keep whatever magic he was using to sedate Wilbur in effect, and he could only do it when he had his hand directly pressing against Wilbur’s chest. If Wilbur could shove the guy off of him and covered his chest, maybe he could clear his head enough to think of a better plan for how to escape this guy.

A few more turns through the labyrinth later, soon they reached the window the fake guard had told him about. They paused in front of it, the guard pursing his lips as he glanced between Wilbur and the window. Then, he shoved Wilbur onto the wall next to it, staring at him for a beat before he took both his hands off of Wilbur—including the hand he had been keeping on Wilbur’s chest.

Then, he started messing with the window to try and get it open. Without the hand pressing against his chest, Wilbur felt his heartbeat slowly pick up speed, and the fog began to dissipate from his mind once again.

Shit. The more Wilbur came back to reality, the more he realized just how bad this situation really was. Somehow, no other guards had found him yet, and if they got off the palace grounds Wilbur was really screwed.

He tried not to let his kidnapper notice how he was ‘waking up’ more and more with each passing second. Instead, he kept his head down, and pretended to be struggling to keep his eyes open.

The fake guard cursed as he fought against the window latch. “Fuckin’ stupid ass piece of shit, I swear I’m gonna break this fucker-”

Wilbur listened to the kidnapper go off on the window latch, trying to keep his breathing even as he formed a plan in his mind. The kidnapper had to focus on Wilbur in order to use his abilities, and he also had to be touching Wilbur’s chest. If Wilbur could just keep him from

getting close, he wouldn't be able to sedate him like that again, and even if Wilbur couldn't outrun him, he would be able to stall until someone else came by.

Finally, after nearly a full two minutes of the fake guard fighting with the window, he flipped the latch and pulled it up in one swift motion. A cool breeze blew in from the outside, ruffling the billowing fabric of Wilbur's clothes and making a chill run down his spine.

The kidnapper looked up at Wilbur again, and he knew this was his moment. "Alright, we're-

"Don't fucking touch me," Wilbur hissed, bringing his hands up to his chest and stumbling backwards from the fake guard. "You're not going to pull that weird sedation shit on me again."

There was a beat of silence as the fake guard stared at him, eyes darting between the hands Wilbur was using to cover his chest, and the now open window. Wilbur waited for him to make a move. To rush at Wilbur, try to pin him again.

Instead though, Wilbur blinked as the fake guard just let out a deep sigh.

"C'mon man, can you just work with me here?" The fake guard pleaded, a whine edging his voice.

Wilbur scoffed. "Work with the guy who is trying to kidnap me? And why the hell would I do that?"

"Because I'm not leaving this palace without you, and it'll be a hell of a lot easier for all of us if you don't fight it," the fake guard told him, folding his arms over his chest. "Plus, I really don't wanna have to knock out the bloke that's blessed by Clara Herself."

"What do you care that I'm blessed by Clara? You're a Deathling. You don't worship Clara," Wilbur pointed out, narrowing his eyes despite the fact that the kidnapper couldn't see it.

The guy snorted. "You clearly don't know shit about Deathlings. We devote ourselves to Kristin, but we still worship Clara. We don't agree with the idea the king likes to push about how if you worship one you can't worship the other. That's just bullshit."

That... That wasn't what Wilbur expected. Everything he'd ever been told about Deathlings implied that they only considered Kristin, their Goddess of Death, to be the only deity worth worshipping.

Before Wilbur could gather his thoughts enough to reply, the fake guard glanced down at his arm, before speaking again.

"Wait, how did you know I was a Deathling?" He asked.

Shit. Wilbur hadn't realized the guy's sleeve was covering his tattoo.

The kidnapper seemed to connect the dots before Wilbur could come up with an excuse. "You had a vision about this happening, didn't you?" He gasped, his eyes going wide.

“Um-”

“You totally did,” the fake guard said, looking both nervous and excited at the same time. “You knew this was going to happen! That’s so fucking cool!” Then, he paused, and his smile fell almost as quickly as it appeared. “Wait, if you knew this was going to happen, why was I still able to grab you? Shouldn’t you have known I wasn’t part of your guard?”

“I don’t see everything, and I didn’t see myself getting fucking kidnapped,” Wilbur hissed, glaring at the guy. “All I knew was something bad was going to happen at the ball, and Deathlings were going to be involved.”

Now, Wilbur could tell the guy was frowning behind his rabbit mask. “Why didn’t you warn the king?”

Sighing, Wilbur almost brought a hand up to pinch the bridge of his nose, but stopped himself when he remembered he had to keep his hands over his chest. “I did,” he admitted. “I did and he didn’t do anything.”

The fake guard blinked a few times at that. “Does he do that a lot? Ignore your warnings?”

And-

Wilbur shouldn’t tell him anything. It was forbidden for anyone outside of the Pythia and the monarch to know the details of their meetings—the warnings the Pythia provided, and how the monarch chose to respond to them.

But he wasn’t supposed to be speaking to a Deathling either. Frustration about Dream had been bubbling up in his chest for years and years now, and for the first time, Wilbur actually had an opportunity to complain about it to someone. Someone he knew wouldn’t go running back to Dream to report his discontent.

Maybe it was the stress of being kidnapped, but Wilbur found the complaints spilling out from his lips unbidden.

“He never fucking listens to me,” Wilbur said, clenching his jaw. “I warn him over and over again about the consequences his shit decisions are gonna have, and he just nods and pretends to take my counsel into consideration before totally ignoring everything I said. King Dream is an arrogant child of a ruler who refuses to consider that he might not know everything. XD might’ve been a prick, but at least he fucking listened to me when I told him shit was going to go wrong.”

The fake guard stared at him for a moment in silence. Wilbur squirmed under his gaze, once again remembering that this was his *kidnapper*. Not a friend. Not a friendly acquaintance he could trust. He should be trying to run, not ranting about the king with this guy.

But even without the guy’s power forcing him to calm down, Wilbur couldn’t find it in himself to be afraid of this Deathling. It was the strangest sensation, because despite the fact that he hadn’t even seen the guy’s face, he almost felt familiar to Wilbur. Like they had met in another life.

Finally, after a few tense seconds, the kidnapper spoke again.

“What’s your name?”

...what?

Wilbur stiffened, eyes going wide as he wondered if he heard the guy right. Did he just ask for Wilbur’s name?

“I... No one uses my name. I’m just The Pythia,” Wilbur muttered, reeling as he tried to remember the last time someone had asked for his name.

Something in the fake guard’s stance shifted then. His shoulders dropped, and those bright blue eyes sticking out from under the rabbit mask seemed to soften. “But you weren’t always The Pythia, right? People used your name at one point.”

Suddenly, the memory flashed in Wilbur’s mind of the last time someone had asked for his name. Kicking and screaming in the palace guard’s hold, having been dragged off the streets without any warning. Being a scared fourteen year old surrounded by people so much older than him, no one telling him what was going on or why he was there.

The Pythia—the one before he took the title—crouching in front of him. Running a hand through his hair and softly asking what his name was. She had repeated it in a whisper, like it was something meant to be a secret.

That was the last time he’d been *Wilbur*. Wilbur and not The Pythia.

It wasn’t... It wasn’t like there were any rules against telling someone his name. But no one had ever asked.

Until now.

“Wilbur,” he whispered, with the same hesitant tone the former Pythia had said his name with. “My name was Wilbur.”

Was. Was and not is. Because Wilbur hadn’t been *Wilbur* for a very long time. He was just The Pythia. A vessel for Clara. The one entrusted to receive Her visions.

Despite the past tense used, the fake guard smiled at him, and it was more genuine than any smile he’d seen in years. Then, he was lifting the rabbit mask off his head, and Wilbur’s eyes widened when he saw his kidnapper’s face for the first time.

Wilbur had assumed a guy who literally kidnapped him would be on the older side, or at least somewhere around the same age as him. But this guy... this was a *kid*. His eyes were wide, and there was still the hint of baby fat on his cheeks, making Wilbur think that at most he could’ve been eighteen.

“I’m Tommy,” the boy told him, slipping his mask under his arm. “Nice to meet you, Wilbur.”

It was jarring to hear his name said out loud by someone else for the first time in so long. Wilbur flinched, although he wasn't sure why. Tommy seemed to notice, because he frowned, but didn't comment on it.

"I don't know if I'd say this is a good first meeting," Wilbur shot back, although he wasn't able to put any heat behind his words, still startled by Tommy using his name. "Also, I wasn't expecting the Deathlings to send a child to try and kidnap me."

Tommy's smile immediately fell, and was replaced with an incredulous frown. "Wh- I'm not a child, bitch!"

"Really? Then how old are you?" Wilbur challenged, raising an eyebrow.

Tommy opened his mouth to reply, but paused, blinking a few times before snapping his mouth shut again. "Fuck you," he muttered, glaring at him.

Wilbur snorted at the childish retort. "I'm a little offended that the Deathlings didn't even see me as a threat enough to send an actual adult to abduct me."

"Fuck you, you stupid bitch!" Tommy shouted, scowling at him. "I'm perfectly goddamn capable of kidnapping your ass! I've gotten you this far, haven't I?"

Wilbur hummed as he glanced around the hallway. "True, but you're not gonna get me to leave with you."

At this, Tommy's scowl faded, and was replaced with something much more hesitant.

"Look, like I said, I don't want to hurt you, Wilbur," Tommy said, taking a step closer to him, not reacting when Wilbur stepped back again. "Plus, are you even happy here?"

Wh- *Was he happy there?*

The first word that settled on the tip of his tongue as soon as he processed the question was a resounding *no*, and Wilbur had to stop himself from spitting it out. His happiness didn't matter. He was The Pythia, he'd been chosen by Clara herself to receive visions of the future, and use it to counsel the direction of the country. This was what he'd always been meant to do.

"It doesn't matter whether I'm happy or not. Clara chose me for this role, and I'm not going to go against Her will," Wilbur said, although the words tasted like dirt on his tongue.

Tommy's blonde brows scrunched together at his answer. "I don't think Clara would want you to be unhappy though."

"I'm the one who speaks for Clara, here. Not you," Wilbur scoffed, pretending like the words hadn't sent a pang through his chest.

"Clara chose you to counsel the king for his decisions, but you said it yourself, he doesn't listen to you," Tommy pointed out, continuing on like Wilbur hadn't spoken. "What's the point in staying here if you can't even do your damn job?"

He took another step closer, and this time, Wilbur didn't step back.

"If you come with me, we're not gonna hurt you," Tommy reassured him, watching him like he was a cornered animal, prone to striking out at any second. "I know there's a lot of shit out there saying Deathlings are dangerous, or that we're all crazy cultists or whatever the hell, but we're not."

This- No, he shouldn't be listening to the fucking Deathling. Especially not the Deathling trying to kidnap him.

"What, so I go from advising the king to advising a group of terrorists?" Wilbur asked, trying to bite out the words but wincing when they fell flat.

Tommy shrugged. "You don't have to advise us at all. Phil just said our goal with taking you is to weaken the government."

Wilbur blinked, not even registering the unfamiliar name of 'Phil'. They... They didn't want him for his visions?

"What?"

"I said it earlier. This isn't really about *you*, it's just about fucking over Dream," Tommy explained, taking another step towards him. "I'm not pretendin' to know your whole fucking life or anything, man, but it's gotta suck ass being stuck in this palace all the time. Especially when Dream won't even let you do your job."

Soon, Tommy was standing right in front of him again. Wilbur kept guarding his chest, but he didn't flinch when Tommy stuck a hand out between them.

"Come with me. Please," Tommy asked quietly.

Silence hung between them. When Wilbur looked down at the hand Tommy had stretched out, he froze.

It was a prosthetic. Intricate carvings of swirling vines and flowers were embedded into the deep purple metal, and Wilbur noticed the soft glimmer of enchantments making the hand shimmer. Then, right above where the metal met flesh, Wilbur saw the mark of the Deathling tattooed on Tommy's wrist.

The hand Wilbur had seen in his vision. The one he had seen himself take.

If he saw himself taking the hand in his dream, that meant Clara... Clara wanted him to go with Tommy. It was the only explanation. The only one that felt *right*.

Wilbur didn't know why Clara would want him to leave the palace, let alone leave the palace with a *Deathling*. But he followed Her will. That was his purpose as Pythia, and if she wanted him to do this, it wasn't his place to question Her.

With his heart pounding in his ears, Wilbur reached out and placed his hand in Tommy's. The metal was cool against his fingers, and he couldn't ignore the way it felt like something

slotted into his chest—like a puzzle piece falling into place.

Tommy beamed, and wrapped his fingers around Wilbur's. "You won't regret this, Big Man. I promise."

Suddenly, Wilbur was being yanked towards the window. Tommy opened it up as wide as it could go, and leaned over the sill so he could see what was outside of it. Wilbur stuck his head out beside Tommy, and his heart dropped into his stomach when he saw the drop down onto the top of the flat top of the fence that surrounded the palace grounds.

"That's a long drop," Wilbur said, his mouth going dry as he second-guessed if Clara really did want him to go with this boy.

Pulling back from the window, Tommy let go of Wilbur's hand and tugged off the black jacket he'd been wearing as part of his guard uniform. He let it drop to the floor, and Wilbur could see that he was now wearing a leather harness over his button up shirt, attached to something that almost looked like a small backpack.

Tommy pressed a button on the strap of the harness, and Wilbur flinched when a pair of metal wings flicked out from the backpack with a soft *woosh*. The wings were nowhere near the size of the Bird's metal wings, but they were made of the same shining metal, with carefully crafted feathers making a series of mechanical clicks as Tommy stretched them out.

"What the fuck is that?" Wilbur asked, resisting the urge to touch the sharp metal feathers.

"They're my wings!" Tommy announced proudly. "Y'know the dude who had those big ass wings back in the ballroom? That's Phil. You'll meet him later, but he can fly with those metal wings he wears. Mine were made by the same guy who made Phil's."

Wilbur narrowed his eyes. "Those don't look big enough to fly with."

"Well, of course I can't fly with these," Tommy scoffed, as if it was obvious. "The giant ones Phil wears are way too fucking heavy for me. But these beauties—" he reached back to pat one of the wings, "let me glide."

Suddenly, the pieces fell into place, and Wilbur glanced out the window again. Another spike of fear rushed through him as he looked between the wings and the drop.

"Are you sure that's safe?"

Tommy laughed at the worry in his tone. "Don't worry, man. I'm an Expert Flyer."

"You know, I'm not sure I fully believe that," Wilbur admitted.

"You're such a fucking pussy," Tommy scoffed, reaching out to grab his wrist and pulling him back to the window. "C'mere, we're gonna jump at the same time, and I'll hold onto you to make sure you don't splat on the ground or anything."

Wilbur stared at the drop, anxiety clawing up his throat.

Clara, is this really what you want from me?

The question was only spoken in his head, but he knew Clara would hear it anyway. Although he didn't expect her to respond—She only ever communicated through his dreams—he thought back to his vision.

Did Clara want him to take Tommy's hand? If he was supposed to prevent that, he would know. He would've been afraid when he took the hand in the vision. It would've been a warning.

But the more Wilbur thought about it, the more he remembered that it wasn't a terrifying thing in the dream. It was something good. Something right.

Yes, this was what Clara wanted. As strange as it seemed, Wilbur had been The Pythia for nine years now. He had long since grown accustomed to figuring out what Clara wanted him to take from his dreams.

"Hope you know what you're doing," Wilbur muttered under his breath.

"What?" Tommy questioned.

"Nothing," Wilbur brushed off. Swallowing down his fear, he clambered onto the windowsill, where Tommy had already settled himself. He looked down at the steep drop, taking a deep breath to try and slow the pounding in his ears.

Tommy glanced over at him, frowning. "You're scared." It wasn't a question.

"Of course I'm scared! Why the hell shouldn't I be?" Wilbur was scared of the jump. He was scared of the fact that he was actually leaving the palace. He was scared that he was putting his safety into the hands of a teenage Deathling—someone he had absolutely no reason to trust, yet found himself wanting to anyway.

Scared didn't cut it. Wilbur was fucking terrified.

Slowly, Tommy held up the hand that wasn't holding onto Wilbur's wrist. His non-prosthetic one. He raised an eyebrow at Wilbur. "I can help you calm down. I won't make you all loopy like before."

While Wilbur wanted to say no because not being able to control himself like that had been *very* unpleasant... he also felt like he was on the verge of throwing up. Plus, this time, Tommy was asking permission. He could've pulled the sedation trick as soon as Wilbur had taken his hand earlier, but he didn't.

Looking down again, Wilbur gulped. Then, he gave a small nod.

Tommy reached over, pressing his flesh and blood hand to Wilbur's chest, just like before. Instead of the heavy fog falling over his thoughts though, Wilbur just felt his racing heartbeat slow down to a normal level. It wasn't pounding in his ears, and he could still think just as clearly as before. It was as if the fear had just... been sucked away from him.

After a few seconds, Tommy pulled his hand away. “That won’t last long. You ready?”

Gritting his teeth, Wilbur nodded.

And then, Tommy jumped, and Wilbur felt himself being yanked off the edge of the windowsill.

“FUCKING-” Wilbur screamed for the brief second he was weightless, squeezing his eyes shut, but then almost immediately, sharp pain shot through his arm as his descent was abruptly cut off. “OUCH!”

“Sorry!” Tommy called from above him.

Opening his eyes, Wilbur gasped when he saw them soar over the edge of the fence. He looked up, noticing how the small wings had now fully extended, and Tommy had a shit-eating grin stretched across his cheeks as he banked to the side.

The prosthetic hand holding onto Wilbur’s wrist didn’t falter in its grip, but Wilbur’s arm ached from the weight of gravity tugging him down. They flew away from the palace, making a hard turn that sent Wilbur’s stomach into knots, and he ended up squeezing his eyes shut again.

Wind rushed past Wilbur’s face as they glided through the air. It made the flowy fabric of his pants billow, and Wilbur cursed the traditional Pythian clothes for being the absolutely opposite of aerodynamic. More pain shot through his arm the longer they flew, and Wilbur knew he was going to have bruises all over his wrist from how tightly Tommy was holding onto it.

Then, without warning, Wilbur felt his feet connect with hard ground. Gasping, he collapsed onto the pavement, cursing when something sharp stung his knees. The metal hand around his wrist disappeared, and Wilbur fell limp onto the ground.

There was the sound of boots scuffing against concrete, and suddenly, hands grabbed Wilbur’s shoulders and pushed him upright.

“Shit, Wil, are you okay?” Tommy asked, grunting as he pushed him into a sitting position against a cold wall. “Sorry about the landing, I probably should’ve warned you but I just- I was busy trying to keep an eye out for the guards but it seems like Phil ‘n techno still got the whole party distracted because there was nothing-”

“Tommy,” Wilbur muttered, cutting the boy’s rambling off. “I’m fine. Just got startled.”

He blinked open his eyes to see Tommy crouched in front of him, blinking owlishly as he looked him over. “You sure?”

Forcing himself to straighten up despite the pain radiating through his shoulder, Wilbur nodded. “Yeah, I’m good. What the hell do we do now?”

Tommy grinned again, jumping to his feet and rushing to the left of Wilbur. When Wilbur turned his head, he realized they’d landed in a dark alleyway.

There were a few dirty puddles scattered around, and the walls closing in on them were made of red brick. The air was bitter, something sour making its way into Wilbur's nose, and he scrunched up his face as he covered his mouth with his hand.

Meanwhile, Tommy didn't seem to mind the stench. He had rushed to the end of the alley, where Wilbur could see there was some large lump with a dark tarp tossed over it. Tommy reached for the tarp, whipping it off in dramatic fashion, and Wilbur's eyes widened when it revealed a gleaming orange hoverbike.

Wilbur hadn't seen a hoverbike in... years. He remembered when he was a kid, he used to watch racers speed by on the streets, looking like little more than blurs of color as they wove expertly between traffic. While he had admired the bikes, he never had the desire to ride one. It wasn't like he had much opportunity considering he was a broke street kid, but the idea still scared the shit out of him all the same.

"Is that yours?" Wilbur asked, using his uninjured arm to push himself off the wall and to his feet.

"Sure is!" Tommy said, grabbing a much larger backpack off the ground next to the bike. He dragged it by his feet, crouching down to unzip it before digging through the contents. "Well, technically it's Sam's, but he lets me borrow it all the time, so it's basically mine too."

Wilbur had no idea who Sam was, but he decided now wasn't the time to ask. Even though Wilbur didn't recognize this alley, they couldn't have gotten that far from the palace just by gliding, and he wasn't sure how much longer the Bird and the Boar were going to be holding up the ballroom. They were definitely running on limited time.

Suddenly, a heavy bundle of fabric slammed into his face, and Wilbur yelped as he struggled to catch whatever it was Tommy had thrown at him.

"Take off that stupid fucking outfit of yours and change into that," Tommy told him.

Frowning, Wilbur shook out the fabric and saw it was a bright yellow windbreaker. "Why?" He asked.

"Because you're gonna stick out like a sore thumb in that getup," Tommy huffed, already pulling a heavy-looking crimson leather jacket over his button up shirt. Then, he yanked out a pile of black fabric, and tossed it at Wilbur as well. "Put those sweatpants on over your pants. You can properly change later, we just need to cover up the weird shit."

Well... it wasn't like Wilbur was particularly attached to his outfit anyway.

First, Wilbur pulled off the veil—it had fallen off his head long ago, but was still wrapped around his neck. Tommy held out a hand for it, and Wilbur handed it to him, watching as he stuffed it in the backpack. Then, Wilbur unbuttoned the shimmering gauze that made up his overshirt, handing it to Tommy again and leaving him in just his plain white undershirt.

Cold air nipped at his arms, and Wilbur shivered as he tugged the windbreaker on. Then, he awkwardly pulled the black sweatpants on over the flowy Pythia pants he'd been wearing,

wincing at how awkward it felt to wear two pairs of pants but figuring it was better than nothing.

Zippering the backpack back up, Tommy hoisted it over his shoulder as he pushed to his feet. He gave Wilbur a once over before nodding. “The shoes are a little strange, but no one will notice them I think.” Then, he stepped closer, reaching for Wilbur’s face. “Now we just need that weird fucking mask off-”

“What the fuck are you doing?!” Wilbur yelled, flinching back before Tommy could pull the mask off.

Tommy jumped back at Wilbur’s shout, staring at him with wide eyes as he slowly put his hand back down to his side. “Um, I was just gonna take your weird mask off?”

Wilbur’s heart was pounding again at how close of a call that had been. “Are you a fucking idiot?! You’d see my eyes if you did that!”

He waited for the realization to sink in. For understanding—for *fear*—to dawn on Tommy’s face as the truth of what he’d almost just done sunk in.

But it didn’t. Tommy just frowned at him, clearly confused.

“Why can’t I see your eyes?”

Oh, surely he wasn’t that stupid, was he?

“You’ve gotta be kidding me,” Wilbur said, raising an eyebrow at Tommy. “You don’t- Do you really not know the most basic shit about The Pythia?”

Tommy’s confusion quickly bled into frustration. “No, I fucking don’t, because no one knows anything about The Pythia! Now why the hell am I not allowed to see your eyes?”

Wilbur blinked, his heart rate slowing as he realized that Tommy was serious. He genuinely didn’t know what Wilbur was talking about. While Wilbur hadn’t known shit about The Pythia when he was first brought to the palace, he had assumed that was just because he was a street kid. But... did the public really not even know about the eye rule?

“Shit, uh, I thought this was common knowledge but it’s said that if anyone looks into the eyes of The Pythia, they’ll be cursed,” Wilbur explained awkwardly, ducking his head to the ground even though his eyes were still covered. “That’s why I’m wearing this thing. It’s enchanted so I can see out of it, and so that people can look at me without worrying about being cursed.”

“Cursed?” Tommy questioned.

“Yeah, it’ll curse your future. It’s said that you’ll die an early death if you look into the eyes of The Pythia,” Wilbur told him.

Tommy blinked, and Wilbur noticed that he’d gone from being confused, to frustrated, and now he almost looked... sad?

“So no one’s seen your eyes since you were-”

“Since I was fourteen,” Wilbur answered before he could finish the sentence. “So, um, I can’t take it off.”

“How old are you now?” Tommy asked, his voice much softer now.

Wilbur was embarrassed when it took him a second to count the years. “I’m twenty-three.”

“Fucking Death below,” Tommy muttered, frowning at the ground. “No one calls you by your name, no one can see your eyes—you do realize how fucked up this all sounds, right?”

“How so?” Wilbur asked, furrowing his brows.

Tommy stared at him silently for a moment, blinking slowly like he was trying to figure out how to explain something to a child.

After a few seconds though, he sighed and shook his head. “Y’know what, we can work on that later. We gotta get out of here.” Tugging the other backpack strap over his shoulder, Tommy climbed onto the bike, and Wilbur watched as it hummed to life with a soft pinging sound.

The bottom of the bike lit up with gold light. A touch screen appeared on the front of the bike, and Tommy tapped a few things on it before he grabbed the handles. The bike was silent as it spun around so it was facing the exit to the alley, and Tommy scooted forward before looking at Wilbur.

“Hop on.”

The mental image of the hoverbike racers being nothing but blurs of color flashed through his mind again.

“Do you have a license to ride that thing?” Wilbur asked.

Tommy scowled. “I’m seventeen and, in your words, I’m in a terrorist death cult. What the fuck do you think?”

Wilbur’s eyes widened. “You’re seventeen?!”

Realizing his mistake, Tommy’s scowl deepened. “Stop being such a bitch and get on the bike or I’m leaving your ass here!”

Huffing out a laugh, Wilbur climbed on the back of the bike, struggling to keep his balance as the bike shifted under his introduced weight. “In case you forgot, you’re the one kidnapping me,” he said as he clutched onto the sides of the seat, waiting for the bike to level out. “Also, uh, where do I hold on?”

“Loop your fingers through my belt loops,” Tommy told him.

Nodding, Wilbur did that, and Tommy waited a few seconds before speaking again.

“You ready?” Tommy asked.

“Uh, I think so,” Wilbur replied, although he didn’t feel ready at all.

Tapping something on the screen, the bike roared to life underneath them. Wilbur jolted as the engine hummed beneath his seat, and tried to ignore his pounding heart.

“Let’s go then!”

And just like that, the bike took off, and Wilbur shrieked as they sped out of the alley and onto the main road.

The palace grew small behind them, and Wilbur couldn’t remember the last time he’d felt this alive.

Chapter End Notes

I might make this part of a series of one shots set in this universe if people say they want more? not sure, we'll see if I get the urge to write more of this very strange au lmao

BEFORE ANYONE MAKES JOKES ABOUT THE BLINDFOLD BEING LIKE SIREN AGAIN i swear to god I didn't even make the connection of wilbur wearing blindfolds in this to siren in clinic until I was finishing this one shot yesterday, that was a total accident I'm not purposefully putting wilbur in blindfolds in my fics
SDFKLDJFKL

(also if you're sitting here like "bones shouldn't you wrap your arms around the driver's waist when you ride a motorcycle" I've been riding on the back of my dad's motorcycle since I was 5 years old and he's always had me hook my fingers through his belt loops, it's a lot easier to hold on that way and more secure, just a fun fact!)

ANYWAY hope you guys enjoyed, uh, whatever this is LMAO I certainly had a fun time exploring the world and introducing all the ideas I have. Wilbur has, uh, a lot of religious trauma and he doesn't even realize it whoops! I have a lot of ideas in mind for future scenes in this au, so hopefully I get the energy to write them!

pls lmk what you thought down in the comments below, I don't respond to most but they really make my day!

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

like stars burning holes right through the dark

Chapter Summary

They arrive at the Deathling's hideout, and Wilbur meets several new faces.

Chapter Notes

LMAO I DIDNT THINK I WAS GONNA MAKE A SECOND CHAPTER TO THIS NGL BUT I GOT SO HYPED HERE WE ARE

as you can see this now has 3 chapters listed on it so it's no longer a one shot. I already have the third chapter done, so I'll probably post it in a few days. Thank you all so much for the love you've given on it so far, I'm really glad you guys like this wacky fusion world of mine! you get to see even more of the cyberpunk-elements in this chapter which I'm very excited for!

anyway this is really a self indulgent thing for me so it's not beta read, so sorry if you see any errors

hope you guys enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The hoverbike was terrifying.

It ducked and weaved between traffic, with Wilbur shrieking every time they veered far too close to a car for his comfort. He held onto Tommy for dear life, sending prayers to Clara every time they made a sharp turn and hoping this wasn't the night he ended up meeting the goddess Herself.

Cars and lights blurred around them, becoming a steady stream that made Wilbur dizzy if he kept his eyes open for too long. The wind whipped past his face, icy air cutting into his cheeks and making him grateful his blindfold mask was enchanted so it couldn't fall off, or else he would've lost it a long time ago.

It had been nearly a decade since Wilbur had last been in the city. As Pythia, he wasn't allowed to leave the palace. Ever. So it was quite a battle with himself as to whether he wanted to keep his eyes open or shut during the ride.

For the most part, the city didn't seem that different from how he remembered it. They stopped at a stoplight, and Wilbur noticed a few kids spray painting a sigil onto the side of a

brick building. The bright blue paint glowed with magic as the kid finished the last circle, and the group of friends laughed as they took turns activating the thing by pressing their hands against the still wet paint.

Above their heads, holographic billboards cast neon light onto the streets. Wilbur saw candy bright advertisements looping over and over again—recommending products like iridescent hair dye and enchanted ink and canned potions you could get from vending machines.

It was *so* much. So much more than what Wilbur remembered. The lights were painful in their artificial brightness, and the constant honking and voices around him were near deafening.

But despite how painful it was readjusting to the outside world, a part of Wilbur couldn't help but be excited at the same time. He was outside for the first time in years, and the city was just as colorful and explosive as it had been in his memories. It was both nostalgic and shockingly new at the same time. He found himself grinning as he looked around the street, only for his smile to fall the second the traffic light turned green.

The further they got from the palace though, the more the creeping hand of anxiety made itself known in Wilbur's chest once again. While he wasn't sure what the palace's protocol was for The Pythia going missing, no one was chasing them, and there weren't any emergency alerts blaring across the holo-boards playing live news feeds on the sides of skyscrapers. This meant that either they hadn't realized he was missing yet, or they had, but they weren't making it public knowledge.

That would be so like Dream to keep it secret that The Pythia had gone missing. It would expose a weak spot in their government, and Dream would rather die than let anyone think Essempi had a single weakness.

The lights and colors grew softer the further they drove. The roads cleared up a bit, and the honking quieted down to a more manageable level of noise. Holo-boards became less common, and Wilbur realized they were getting further into the poorer district in the city.

Wilbur was struck with a sense of *deja vu* as the buildings went dark, and the roads emptied out almost completely. He recognized this neighborhood. It was one he'd stayed in a lot when he was a street rat, finding sleep in dark alleyways or on bus top benches knowing that the police had bigger things to deal with in that area than a scrawny kid like him.

That was... a strange thing to remember. Wilbur wasn't one to dwell on the past—at least not when he could avoid it. He quite literally saw the future, and thus tried to keep his gaze focused on looking forward instead of behind him.

But surrounded by the ghosts of his past, something dark and wholly unwelcome crawled up his throat. He took a shaky breath and tried to keep his eyes on the road ahead of them, but when that didn't help, he instead decided to stare very intently at the back of Tommy's head.

Wilbur hadn't noticed it before, but Tommy was wearing earrings. One of the earrings dangled from a gold chain, and when Wilbur looked closer, he saw that the chain was

wrapped around a small emerald. The other earring was just a stud, and looking from behind, Wilbur had no clue what it was except that it had a gold backing.

When they stopped at a light again, Wilbur brought a hand up to his own ear, lightly touching the unmarked lobe. Piercings were forbidden for The Pythia. As were tattoos, and cybernetic enhancements of any kind.

It wasn't something Wilbur minded. He understood why. As The Pythia, he was a vessel for Clara. It wasn't his place to make alterations to Her vessel.

Soon, they passed through Wilbur's old neighborhood, and he breathed a sigh of relief when the streets became unfamiliar to him once more. They drove even further out, until the street signs were completely unrecognizable, and the sidewalks were bustling with unfamiliar faces.

The buildings crowded in here. Sagging apartments tilted forward so they leaned dangerously over the road, flickering neon signs making Wilbur's eyes hurt as they dangled on thin wires above their heads. The air was thick with the smell of rancid rainwater and fried food. They passed by what looked like a small noodle kiosk, with smoke billowing up above the stand as an old man tossed the noodles up and down in a large wok. Taking a breath in, Wilbur struggled to swallow the thick air, a thin layer of sweat pricking up under his windbreaker despite the cold weather. Tommy didn't seem to mind the difference, but Wilbur was already feeling his hair stick to his forehead.

Without warning, they made a sharp turn into a dark alley. Wilbur grunted at the sudden move, before stiffening as he realized they were slowing down.

Tommy stopped the bike at what looked like a dead end. Stained brick surrounded them on all sides, and as the engine to the bike was cut off with a soft whir, Wilbur wondered if this was some kind of trap he'd been led into.

But then again, Tommy had technically kidnapped him. This was already a trap, it wouldn't make sense for there to be another trap.

Once the bike was fully parked, Tommy lifted his leg over the side and hopped off onto the flat stone below. Then, he held a hand out to Wilbur as a silent offer to help.

Wilbur took the hand, mainly because he knew if he tried to climb off the hoverbike himself he'd end up tipping the whole damn thing over. After a few seconds of pained grunting, Wilbur found both his feet on solid ground again, and hoped to god he didn't have to ride one of those things anytime in the near future.

"I won't lie, this is a little underwhelming for the Deathling's hideout," Wilbur joked once he let go of Tommy's hand, wrapping his arms over his chest to steady himself.

"Obviously this isn't our hideout," Tommy scoffed, rolling his eyes as he walked over to the brick wall at the very end of the alley.

Wilbur watched as Tommy pressed his prosthetic hand to the wall, the enchantment runes glowing a soft blue the minute they touched the brick. After three full seconds, Tommy lifted

his hand off the brick, and traced a shape into the heart of one of the dull red bricks.

The shape Tommy traced was lit up in a pale shade of red, almost a complete contrast to the runes on Tommy's prosthetic. It was like a half circle, with two flat lines extending from the bottom out the sides. Wilbur had never seen a symbol like that before, and wondered what it meant.

As soon as Tommy traced the figure, something in the air shifted. It was like some kind of energy was humming all around them, making bubbles pop across the bare skin of Wilbur's face as he watched the brick wall recede into itself.

There was the scratching sound of brick dragging against brick, but after a few moments, Wilbur and Tommy were left standing in front of a staircase leading down into darkness.

"That literally looks like the staircase to the underworld or some shit," Wilbur said, trying to smother down the erratic staccato of his heart with dry humor.

Tommy huffed. "It's called being on theme, dumbass. It makes us cool."

"It does not make you cool," Wilbur shot back.

"Does too."

"Does not."

"Does too!"

Wilbur rolled his eyes, grateful for Tommy's banter distracting him from the fear that would shoot through him every time he glanced into the darkness. It was like the stairs were a portal to something else, with the way the light just abruptly cut off only five steps in.

Tommy scoffed at Wilbur's dismissal, and walked forward to take a few steps onto the stairs. Before he reached the darkness however, he glanced behind him, and realized Wilbur wasn't following.

It seemed like Tommy opened his mouth to make a snarky comment, but paused when his eyes flickered over Wilbur's face. Despite not being able to see his eyes, there must've been some other fear visible on the uncovered parts of his face, because Tommy's expression immediately softened.

"I promised you wouldn't regret this, remember?" Tommy reminded him, raising an eyebrow. He reached out the prosthetic hand again, and Wilbur felt the same tug to take it.

Swallowing down his anxiety, Wilbur grabbed the cool metal again. "I remember."

"Then just trust me on this."

And with that, Tommy pulled Wilbur into the staircase, and Wilbur let himself be led into the darkness.

His shoes clicked against the concrete stairs. Once they'd gotten a few steps down, there was another loud scratching sound, and Wilbur saw the brick wall behind them was closing itself up.

He squeezed Tommy's hand on instinct as they were swallowed by shadows, breath catching in his throat when all the light was snuffed out. But before he could get himself worked up into a panic, the staircase was suddenly illuminated by a soft, purple glow.

Hundreds of tiny lights, no bigger than the tip of Wilbur's finger, floated all around them in the air. He gasped at the way it reminded him of the pictures he'd seen of stars before, blinking a few times when one of the lights flew right in front of his face.

They were the size of small bugs, and looked to be bots of some kind. They buzzed around Wilbur's head, the pale purple light emanating from their backs and casting everything in a comforting gloom.

"They're supposed to look like fireflies, if you've ever heard of those," Tommy told him, his voice echoing off the narrow walls as he guided Wilbur down the stairs. "Sam designed them one day as a way to experiment with tiny bots, and we all liked them so much he made a shit ton of them."

Fireflies. Wilbur had heard the term before—a type of bug that had gone extinct a long time ago, that had a soft orange light on its back and would fly around on summer nights like living stars. Wilbur wouldn't have expected a group of cultists to like something so pretty and simple, but then again, nothing he had learned about the Deathlings tonight was really expected, so this was just another thing on the list.

"They're beautiful," Wilbur said, smiling when one of the 'fireflies' buzzed right next to his nose.

Tommy glanced back at him, and Wilbur saw he was grinning too. "Yeah man, they're pretty damn cool."

They continued down the staircase with the robotic fireflies as their guide. For a long time, the staircase just went straight down, and Wilbur felt like he was walking into the center of the Earth. After a while, the staircase made a sharp turn, and then another, and it wasn't long before Wilbur felt totally turned around.

Finally though, after walking for what felt like eons, the staircase flattened out and they came to another plain brick wall.

Tommy ran up to the wall, pressing a button between the bricks that was nearly invisible to the naked eye. Then, a small glowing touchpad appeared from the wall, and Tommy pressed his non-prosthetic hand against it.

It seemed to be a scanner of some kind. After a few seconds of silence, the scanner beeped and retracted back into the wall. Tommy took a step back, pulling Wilbur back with him.

There were a few seconds of silence. Then, there was more scratching as the bricks slid aside, revealing a dark metal door.

Stepping up to the door, Tommy pounded against it with his free hand. Then, a rectangular eye hole on the door slid open.

A pair of mismatched red and blue eyes—almost certainly cybernetic—appeared in the eyehole.

“Tommy? Is that you?” A man’s voice, tinged with the metal of an artificial voice box, asked.

“No dumbass, it’s Tommy’s identical evil twin,” Tommy scoffed, rolling his eyes. “Of course it’s me!”

The eyes narrowed, and Wilbur flinched when they landed on him. “Holy shit, is that-”

“Yup, it’s him,” Tommy cut the doorman off. “Now let us the fuck in.”

“Tommy, you know the drill. Give the password.”

“You are such a fucking bitch Jack Manifold you know damn well it’s me-”

“For fuck’s sake, just do it!” The man—Jack apparently—shouted, interrupting Tommy’s rant.

Groaning loudly, Tommy let go of Wilbur’s hand to hold up his prosthetic. He closed his eyes, and Wilbur watched as the Deathling mark flashed a bright silver color.

Then, he opened his eyes, and raised an eyebrow.

“That good enough for you?”

Sighing, Jack slid the eyehole shut. Then, after a half a second, there was a deafening screech as the metal door slid open.

Jack Manifold stood on the other side of the door. He was a young man, seemingly a few years older than Tommy, with a thin face and a shaved head. His cybernetic eyes glowed in the low light, and he had his arms folded over his chest. When Wilbur peered closer, he noticed the skin around his left eye was made of similar purple metal like Tommy’s hand, with the metal stretching back over part of his skull.

“Thanks Manibitch,” Tommy huffed, grabbing Wilbur’s hand again and dragging him through the door.

“Whoa, not even gonna introduce me?” Jack asked, stepping in front of Tommy and cutting off their path. He was eyeing Wilbur with unabashed curiosity, and Wilbur tried not to squirm under the questioning gaze.

“Everyone will get to meet him soon enough. I need to take him to Phil and Techno first,” Tommy told him, sounding more annoyed than he actually looked. “Are they back yet?”

“They just got back a few minutes before you guys did,” Jack said, still staring at Wilbur. “You’ve gotten good at your magic. He doesn’t even look sedated.”

Tommy rolled his eyes and shouldered past Jack with a low, “that’s because he’s not.”

Jack gaped at Tommy, but Tommy ignored him as he dragged Wilbur fully through the door and into the Deathlings hideout itself.

As soon as they were past Jack, Wilbur gasped as the entire room opened up.

It was a cavern. A huge cavern with giant rock spears hanging down towards their heads, like a monster’s fingers reaching for them. A bit below the rock spears, thick wires stretched across the length of the ceiling, crossing over one another like some kind of mesh. The cavern was bustling with life, different people walking around, chatting amicably with one another as they made their way to wherever they were going.

Floating lights that were much, much larger than the fireflies bathed the entire place in shades of purple and blue. In a way, they reminded Wilbur of small planets, floating against the dark stone and rock that sat dozens of feet above their heads. Supply crates littered the area, and when Wilbur recognized the labels on the sides of the metal and plastic, he realized these must’ve been stolen off of delivery trucks.

Tommy dragged him through the main cavern with the self-assuredness and quickness of someone who knew this place like the back of their hand. Wilbur kept his head down, ignoring the curious stares from Deathlings passing by as he tried to keep his breathing even.

He was in the heart of enemy territory. He’d willingly let himself be kidnapped by terrorists, and now he was deep in the Earth with no way to escape.

A part of Wilbur wanted to panic. The other part of him kept reminding him how Clara had wanted this for him, and he had been taught to trust Her above all else.

Plus, despite how easily Tommy could’ve lied to him, Wilbur couldn’t find it in himself to distrust the boy. He was still dragging Wilbur by the hand, squeezing his fingers every few seconds in a way that was both reassuring and grounding for him.

Wilbur didn’t look up when he heard voices murmuring about him. He just stuck close to Tommy, following his lead because Tommy clearly had somewhere to be. They hurried between two rows of supply crates, before stopping in front of a metal door designed to look like the entrance to a bank vault.

Slamming his fist against the metal, Tommy shouted, “Phil! Techno! We’re here!”

After a few seconds, there was a muffled, “come in!”

Turning to Wilbur, Tommy gave him a small smile. “You ready to meet the Big Guys?”

Wilbur gulped. “I kind of feel like I’m gonna throw up, but I guess I’m ready as I’ll ever be.”

Tommy held up his non-prosthetic hand. “Do you want me to-”

“No,” Wilbur said, cutting him off. “I’ll be okay. It’s not that bad.”

“Let me know if you change your mind,” Tommy said, squeezing his fingers again.

Then, Tommy dropped Wilbur’s hand, using both of his to twisting the vault spinner with a heaving grunt. Wilbur stepped back as the vault door swung open, and gave Tommy an uncertain look, waiting for him to go first.

Tommy paused, and took a shaky breath, like moving the vault door had taken more energy out of him than he thought. There was a slight wheeze to his breathing, but it was gone almost as quickly as Wilbur had noticed it.

Then, Tommy led the way inside, with Wilbur following close behind.

The room was much smaller than the main cavern. Dark metal walls were intermixed with natural stone, and the space was dominated by a large holo-map spread out over a black table. As the vault door slammed shut behind them, Wilbur flinched, his eyes flickering around the room before they fell on two people sitting at the end of the table.

The two men stood up as they both entered, and Wilbur immediately recognized them as the two Deathlings that had crashed the ball—the Boar and the Bird.

The Boar was younger, looking to be somewhere in his early to mid twenties without his skull mask on. He had bright pink hair pulled back in a low ponytail that glowed in the lowlights of the room, and a broad frame that would make even the biggest guards back in the palace intimidated. His arms were decorated with a few sigil tattoos here and there, and his eyes were a shade of brown so dark, they were almost crimson.

The Bird was a bit older, somewhere in his mid to late thirties at most and no longer wearing his mask or his wings. Icy blue eyes stared at Wilbur from a thin face, his jaw covered in pale blonde stubble that matched the hair that fell to his chin. What caught Wilbur’s attention the most though wasn’t anything to do with his face, but with his arms.

Like the Boar, the Bird had tattoos on his arms. But only a few that Wilbur could see were sigil tattoos. Instead, the rest of them just seemed to be decorative tattoos—dark birds, stars set against black skies, and skulls of all shapes and sizes littered his skin like paint on a canvas. It was beautiful, albeit a bit macabre in certain parts.

The Bird smiled at Wilbur when he noticed him looking at his arms. Wilbur took another breath to try and calm the racing of his heart.

Once the door slammed shut, there was a beat of silence between the four. Then, the Boar spoke up.

“You actually got them,” the Boar said, raising his eyebrows at Wilbur.

“What, did you think I couldn’t do it?” Tommy challenged, giving the Boar an annoyed look.

The Boar huffed. “I mean, I was expectin’ them to be passed out on the ground when you got back here. I’m surprised they’re still standing.”

“Techno,” the Bird admonished, giving him a sharp look. “We can get the full story later, but we’re being rude to our guest.” With that, the Bird walked around the table towards Wilbur, a soft smile stretched across his face as he stopped a few feet in front of him. “Pythia, it’s an honor to meet you. I apologize for the circumstances, but I would like to extend to you the full hospitality of the Deathlings.”

Wilbur blinked, startled at being addressed directly for the first time since they’d arrived here.

“Um, I appreciate the apology,” Wilbur muttered, not sure how else to respond to that.

“My name is Philza, Head Acolyte for the Deathlings, but you can just call me Phil,” the Bird—Phil—introduced, and Wilbur remembered Tommy mentioning that name earlier. “I don’t know if Tommy here has told you much, but we have no intentions of harming you. We’d never harm someone blessed directly by Clara Herself.”

“I told him that already,” Tommy cut in. “He came with me willingly.”

Techno frowned at that, while Phil’s eyes widened in surprise.

“How the hell did you manage that?” Techno asked, glancing between Tommy and Wilbur.

Tommy nudged Wilbur’s shoulder, and raised an eyebrow at him. “Do you wanna explain, Wil?”

Shit. Yeah. They were probably going to want to know why the hell The Pythia would willingly go with a teenage terrorist trying to kidnap him.

“Um... it’s kind of hard to explain,” Wilbur started, wrapping his arms around himself as he resisted the urge to step back from Phil. “It was- well, it’s-”

Suddenly, there was a warm hand resting on his arm, and Wilbur glanced over to see Tommy latching onto him. The touch was grounding, and Wilbur took another moment to try and steady himself.

“Do you want me to tell them?” Tommy whispered in his ear.

Wilbur... Wilbur should be able to explain himself. He was able to talk to Tommy just fine when it was the two of them, but now everything was just so overwhelming. The unfamiliar room, the way it felt like the stone above their heads was pressing down on him, the strange eyes watching his every move—it was getting harder to breathe by the second, and Wilbur felt his throat closing up whenever he tried to make words work.

So he nodded at Tommy, and was relieved when Tommy nodded back like it was the easiest thing in the world.

“So when I was kidnapping him, we started chattin’ a bit,” Tommy began, moving forward to rest his hands on the table. “Basically, Dream is a fucking idiot who doesn’t listen to him when he gets visions from Clara. The reason the government has been so shit is because they’re not even bothering to take advice from the guy who can literally see the fucking

future. Naturally, that's pretty damn frustrating, so when I promised him we wouldn't hurt him or anything, he agreed to come with me."

Wilbur's shoulders dropped a bit after Tommy finished recounting his confession. That was something strictly forbidden for anyone to hear. No one was supposed to know about the personal relationship between the monarch and The Pythia. But now not only did Tommy know this information, so did the fucking leader of the Deathlings himself.

Both Phil and Techno blinked in surprise. Phil cocked his head to the side in a way that was all too reminiscent of a crow, staring at Wilbur like he was something utterly fascinating.

"Forced to see the future but unable to do anything to change it," Phil murmured, almost as if he was talking to himself. "I can only imagine how difficult that's been to deal with."

Wilbur shrunk in on himself, but opened his mouth to speak anyway. "XD used to listen to me," he admitted, wincing at how hoarse he sounded. "He was a fucking asshole, but at the very least he'd listen when I counseled him. Dream just pretends to listen and then refuses to take any of my advice. With XD I was a political advisor, but with Dream I just- he just doesn't care. I'm more of a bragging point than anything else to him."

Phil hummed in understanding. "XD was a cruel king, but he respected the ways of Clara. Dream doesn't respect any of the gods."

"No, he doesn't," Wilbur agreed, shaking his head.

Pursing his lips, Phil shook his head and took a step back towards the table. "Well, I'm glad you agreed to go with Tommy. As I said, we have no intentions of harming you. We'll extend you the fullest hospitality we can while you're here, Pythia."

Wilbur nodded in thanks, but Tommy scoffed. "He has a name."

Phil raised an eyebrow. "Are we allowed to refer to The Pythia by name?"

All eyes turned to him, and Wilbur forced himself to nod. "Technically, there are no rules against it. But, um, people just call me by my title most of the time anyway." Then, because he figured they were going to ask, he added, "my name was Wilbur."

Despite the fact that Tommy had been calling him by his name the entire night, it still felt easier to say 'was' instead of 'is'. Because Wilbur wasn't sure who *Wilbur* even was anymore. Who he was without his title of Pythia. Was there even a person under the traditions and the visions?

There wasn't supposed to be. Wilbur as a person was supposed to have died the day he woke up from his first vision dream.

"I noticed Tommy called you 'Wil' earlier," Phil pointed out, his voice much softer than before. "Is it alright for us to use that name for you? Or would you rather we call you by your title?"

Despite how he'd long since grown used to being called only by Pythia and nothing else, hearing Tommy use his name multiple times over the past few hours seemed to make the wound raw and new again. He hadn't realized it until now, but he desperately missed hearing his own name, even if it was strange and unfamiliar to his own ears.

"You can call me Wilbur," he said quietly.

Phil nodded, while Techno picked up a tablet off the table to write something down.

"Is there anything else we need to know about Pythian traditions?" Techno chimed in, looking directly at Wilbur now. "Things we can't call you, or can't do with you. We might dedicate ourselves to the Lady of Death, but we still hold Clara in the highest regard and wouldn't want to disrespect Her in any way."

Wilbur thought back to when Tommy almost pulled off his blindfold.

"You can't see my eyes," Wilbur quickly told them, noticing how Tommy flinched at the reminder of his fuck up. "That's why I'm still wearing this mask, which is enchanted so I can see through it. Anyone who looks into the eyes of The Pythia will be cursed with an early death."

"I don't remember reading about that in any of the old texts," Phil pointed out, frowning at him.

"It's what I was taught by the former Pythia," Wilbur shrugged, absently fiddling with the edge of his mask. Silently, he wondered what Phil meant by the old texts. All the ancient texts regarding Clara and the Pythia existed only in the palace and nowhere else, so no secrets about the Pythia could get out. Where the hell would Phil have gotten texts like those?

Phil nodded as Techno wrote that down into the tablet as well. "That thing looks a little heavy. If you want, we can get Niki to enchant a cloth blindfold for you to wear. Might be more comfortable," Techno offered.

"I would appreciate that," Wilbur said, nodding at Techno in thanks.

Another silence hung over the room. Wilbur fiddled with his hands, wondering what happened now.

"Well, I'm sure you've had a long day, Wilbur," Phil said, and Wilbur jumped at hearing his name again. "Tommy can take you to the room you'll be staying in, and you can get a proper tour and meet everyone in the morning. Is that alright with you?"

"That's fine," Wilbur replied, although he wasn't sure how well he'd be able to sleep in a place like this.

Nodding, Tommy shared a knowing look with Phil and Techno, before he grabbed Wilbur's hand again and led him towards the door.

They left without another word. The cavern had emptied out a bit during their brief meeting, but Wilbur still felt stares lingering on him as they walked past the other Deathlings. Tommy

took him away from the meeting room they'd been in, across the cavern and through another row of supply crates until they came across what looked like a whole series of rooms lined up next to each other like apartments.

These doors weren't vaults, like for the meeting room. They were more akin to the metal door Jack let them in through—heavy and intimidating, but secure at the same time. Tommy walked down the row of doors, somehow knowing exactly where he was going despite the fact that none of the doors were labeled.

After a few minutes, they stopped in front of another identical unlabeled door. Tommy dropped Wilbur's hand and swung it open, gesturing for Wilbur to enter first.

The room itself was small, but not cramped. The walls were more of the same patchwork between natural stone and sheet metal. The ground was a smoother kind of stone, with a few threadbare rugs in varying shades of purple and blue thrown over it. There was a mattress sitting in the far corner of the room, with heavy looking black blankets draped over it. Besides the mattress though, there was no furniture.

"Sorry the place is so bare. It's technically, uh, a cell so the others didn't want anything in here you could use to escape," Tommy explained, looking awkward as he gestured at the empty space. "Bathroom is over there," he continued, pointing to a small alcove in the corner covered with a dark curtain, "and that screen over there is the 'door' that connects to my room."

Following where Tommy was pointing, Wilbur noticed another alcove in the stone that looked like a short tunnel, seeing the screen door that was propped in front of the passageway.

"Our rooms connect?" Wilbur asked, frowning at Tommy.

"They wanted me to be able to reach you quickly if you started freaking out or trying to escape or anything," Tommy said with a shrug. "Um, but if you need anything you can just, uh, let me know. Tomorrow I'll wake you up for breakfast, and then I can give you the grand tour, if that's alright with you?"

Wilbur snorted. "Tommy, I'm technically your prisoner."

Tommy scrunched up his face at that. "Well, maybe at first, but you came with me willingly! It's different!"

"I suppose so," Wilbur shrugged, wringing his hands in front of him.

An awkward silence fell over them. Wilbur wasn't sure if he was supposed to say anything else, and Tommy didn't seem to know if he should stick around or leave Wilbur alone.

"Um, since you're not a prisoner really I'm gonna leave that door unlocked," Tommy told him, pointing at the main door to the room. "But I wouldn't recommend leaving this room tonight. Mainly because the cave system can be really confusing for newbies, and getting lost in this place sucks ass. Especially since Jack's on door duty tonight, meaning he'll probably

be the one to find you, and you don't wanna be stuck talking to Jack Manifold for very long." He shuddered at this, as if talking to Jack Manifold was a punishment no one deserved.

"Is there something wrong with Jack?" Wilbur asked, thinking of how the man—while naturally curious—didn't seem very rude or unpleasant during their brief exchange.

"Nah, there's nothing wrong with him, he's just a bitch," Tommy snorted, flashing him a grin. "Also when I give you the tour tomorrow we'll meet Niki, and she can enchant a better blindfold for you so you don't have to go around with that gaudy ass thing on your face."

Wilbur remembered Techno mentioning a 'Niki' earlier. He supposed she must've been their main enchanter.

"So, uh, is there anything else you need before I go? I gotta go talk to Phil and Techno again," Tommy asked, raising an eyebrow at him.

Although Wilbur wasn't sure if he wanted to be alone in such an unfamiliar place, he shook his head no. He had known Tommy for a few hours, yet he was the closest thing Wilbur had to a friend for miles around. Still, he had his own stuff to do, and Wilbur... well, Wilbur should probably try to get some rest.

"I'm fine. Just don't stay up too late, child," Wilbur teased.

Tommy scoffed. "I'm not a child! I can go to bed as late as I want!"

"Maybe you need a bed time," Wilbur shot back, smirking at the indignant face Tommy made in response.

"You're such a bitch. Can't believe I saved your sorry ass from that stupid palace," Tommy grumbled as he headed towards the door.

"You literally kidnapped me!" Wilbur shouted as Tommy stepped out the door.

"Same difference!" Tommy yelled back.

And then, the door slammed shut, and Wilbur was alone in the room.

...his room. He supposed this was his room for the foreseeable future.

Finally alone, Wilbur's shoulders dropped as he brought his hands up to take the mask off. It was a relief to get the weight off his eyes, and he carefully set the mask on the bed, dragging his hands down his face as he let out a soft groan.

"Fucking hell," he muttered under his breath, rubbing at the corners of his eyes.

What a day.

Wilbur checked out the bathroom to see if he could get cleaned up from the wild evening he'd had. It wasn't all that different from the main room, with a shower in the far corner, a toilet, and a sink carved into the stone. There was some soap that seemed surprisingly new

sitting under the sink, but it was nothing compared to the luxurious soaps and lotions he'd been given back at the palace.

Still, soap was soap. Wilbur splashed some water on his face and scrubbed around his eyes, making sure there was no lapis dust that had smudged onto his skin from the runes on the mask. Once his face was clean, he dried himself off with a stiff towel he found. Then, he figured that was as good as he was going to get for that night, and made his way back into the main room.

Now alone, Wilbur was able to change properly so he wasn't wearing his Pythia pants under the sweatpants Tommy had given him. He left the Pythia pants folded carefully on the ground, and tossed the yellow windbreaker next to it, leaving him in just the sweatpants and his undershirt.

It felt strange, crawling into an unfamiliar bed for the first time in nearly a decade. The mattress was thin, but the blankets were soft, and Wilbur stared at the ceiling as the floating light in the center of the room turned off automatically.

"Clara," Wilbur whispered to the air to start his prayer, "may you bless my dreams tonight, so that I may know I am walking down the path you have chosen for me."

In the darkness, he could just make out the faint cracks in the stone.

"Please tell me if I'm doing the right thing," Wilbur added on after a moment of thought.

And then, he closed his eyes, and begged his Goddess for sleep.



"So what the hell happened?" Phil asked as soon as the vault door slammed shut behind him.

"Why are you asking that like you're pissed? I thought you'd be thrilled that I got Wilbur here without knocking him out cold," Tommy grumbled, settling himself in the chair next to the one Phil was sitting in.

"I'm not pissed," Phil quickly clarified, reaching a hand out to ruffle Tommy's hair. "I'm actually proud of you, but I'm also pretty fucking confused."

"I second that," Techno chimed in from where he was leaning against the table, facing them both. "Like, I didn't have a lot of expectations for the Pythia, but I didn't expect him to just be like, 'yo you can kidnap me that's cool.' That ain't normal."

Huffing, Tommy lightly batted Phil's hand away from his head. "Trust me, if you were there, if you saw the way Dream treated him and heard the way he talked to me, you would get it."

Phil cocked his head as he blinked at Tommy, in that freaky crow way he always did when he was considering someone.

"Then explain to us what you saw," Phil said after a beat.

Well, that was to be expected.

Taking a breath, Tommy waited a moment, feeling the way the air scraped the back of his throat and caught in a bubble in the center of his chest. He coughed once and the breath cleared up.

“Alright, so I was pretending to be part of Wilbur’s guard during the ball, right? So he was standing there, dressed in these stupid fucking clothes, and just- I dunno, the way people were *staring* at him. That weirded me out right from the get go,” Tommy began, frowning as he thought back to the way Wilbur had been openly gaped at by the guests. “The only time anyone came over to talk to him though was when Dream brought them over. He did this, like, six fucking times in a row. He’d come over with some rich looking royal asshole, introduce them to Wilbur, and then just leave them alone to go grab someone else.”

Narrowing his eyes, Tommy thought back to how overwhelming the whole ordeal was. The sights, the sounds, the colors—and how Wilbur had seemed like some kind of lonely pillar in a sea of people. How he’d stiffen up every time Dream brought someone over to talk to him, the way he’d smile in a way that was perfectly crafted and wholly unnatural, and how the smile would drop the second the guest would turn their back.

“People either asked him if he’d seen any futures with them in it, or just gush to him about Clara and how ‘close’ and ‘personal’ their bond was with Her. Not once did I see a single person ask how he was doing, what he thought of the ball, nothing about him. It was all about them, and about Clara, and just-“ Tommy cut himself off, taking a breath as he tried to figure out how to word what he wanted to say. “It was like I was watching a statue that had come to life. No one was talking to him like a normal fucking guy.”

“Well, maybe that’s just how you’re supposed to interact with the Pythia,” Phil pointed out.

Tommy scoffed. “I’m not done yet. Later on, after I grabbed him and I was trying to get out the window, he caught onto how my magic worked and tried to block me from being able to get my hand on his chest. So that’s when I decided to just try and talk to him like a person instead of sedating him.”

Another pause.

“Y’know how he said people usually just refer to him by his title instead of his name?” Tommy asked, glancing between Phil and Techno. They both nodded. “When I asked him for his name back in the palace, he looked at me like I’d grown a second fucking head. You heard him say his name *was* Wilbur instead of *is*, right?”

“I thought that was a little odd, yeah,” Techno said.

“He told me no one ever used his name, and only called him the Pythia. I don’t know for sure, but I’m almost certain I’m the first person to have asked for his name since he became the fuckin’ Pythia,” Tommy explained, curling his prosthetic hand into a fist as he thought back to the moment. Then, he glanced between Phil and Techno. “How old do you think he is?”

Both Phil and Techno seemed confused by the question.

“It was a little hard to tell with the mask,” Techno shrugged.

“If I had to take a guess I’d say... thirty?” Phil suggested.

Techno nodded in agreement. “Yeah, maybe thirty.”

Tommy huffed. “He’s twenty-three.”

Immediately, both Phil and Techno stiffened.

“He’s... He’s younger than you, Techno,” Phil muttered, something troubled crossing over his face.

Techno, meanwhile, was looking to the ceiling like he was doing the math in his head. “Wait, the last time we had a Pythia change out was nine years ago, so if he’s twenty-three-”

“He was only fourteen when he became the Pythia,” Phil finished for him, staring wide-eyed at a blank spot on the wall. There was a moment as Phil processed this information, and then his head snapped to Tommy again. “Are you telling me no one has even called him by his name since he was fourteen?”

“Do you see what I mean now?” Tommy asked, relieved that they were finally getting it. “No one has called him by his name, or even seen his full face for nine years. Dream doesn’t respect him, and uses him as a prop to brag to the other nations about how powerful we are. When I asked him if he was happy at the palace, his first response was literally to say his happiness didn’t matter because Clara chose him for the role, and he wasn’t going to go against Her will. The whole thing just feels so fucked up.”

With his point finally having been made, Tommy slumped back in his chair, glancing between Phil and Techno to gauge their reactions. Neither of them seemed very happy at what Tommy had told them. Phil looked as though he was torn between being angry and sad, while Techno just looked downright disturbed.

“As bad as this sounds, at the moment it’s mostly just speculation,” Phil said after a few moments. “Now that Wilbur’s here, we can ask him directly about his experiences as the Pythia.”

While Tommy wanted to argue that they weren’t there, it wasn’t speculation because they didn’t *see* the way those people treated Wilbur—he knew there was no point in arguing it any further. Phil and Techno believed him, they just wanted to hear the same thing from Wilbur, which was understandable.

Heaving out a sigh, Tommy slumped over the side of his chair so his head was buried in Phil’s shoulder. Phil let out a soft chuckle at the gesture, and Tommy felt a warm arm wrap around his back. “You tired, mate?”

“I broke into the royal palace, kidnapped the second most important person in there, and then made it all the way back here without getting caught. What the fuck do you think?”

Behind him, Techno snorted. “Yeah, I’d say that’s enough to earn you a solid nap.”

“I need more than a nap. I need twelve hours of straight sleep, and a coffee the size of my goddamn head,” Tommy mumbled into Phil’s shirt.

“How about we work on the coffee in the morning, and for now you work on the twelve hours of sleep?” Phil suggested, more laughter vibrating through his chest.

Stifling a yawn, Tommy nodded as he lifted his head from Phil’s shoulder. With his rant about Wilbur’s treatment in the palace over, the exhaustion of the day had hit him all at once. All he wanted now was to get back to his room, and pass the hell out.

“Sounds good to me,” Tommy muttered, stumbling to his feet. “So tomorrow I gotta give him the tour, right?”

Techno nodded, resting a hand on his shoulder to steady him. “Yup, then take him to Niki for a new blindfold.”

“You got it.” Tommy gave them both a weak thumbs up, before he trudged back to the vault door at the front of the room. “Night guys.”

“May Her Eternal Darkness bless your slumber,” Phil called out with a gentle smile.

“Uh, yeah, what he said,” Techno added.

Holding back a laugh, Tommy waved to the two of them before he swung open the door, hurrying out of the conference room on his tired legs.

The cavern was almost completely emptied out compared to earlier when he’d taken Wilbur through it. Still, he kept his head down, not wanting to have to answer any questions about his mission when it was enough of a struggle for him to stand.

Thankfully, he made it back to his room without running into anyone else. Tommy shut the heavy metal door behind him, letting out a deep sigh as he leaned his full weight against the wall.

Shit. While this whole thing had certainly gone a lot better than he thought it would, he was pretty damn exhausted. His lungs ached from all the running and talking he’d done, and when he took another wheezing breath, he winced at the way the air scraped through his throat once again.

Slipping off his jacket, Tommy bent down to untie his boots, cursing under his breath when his prosthetic’s fingers got tangled up in the laces. That tended to happen when he got tired. His prosthetic wouldn’t respond as fast as it was supposed to, which made any task that involved hand dexterity more difficult than it should’ve been.

Not wanting to even try to struggle with it, Tommy just used his other hand to untie the laces. Then, he kicked his boots off towards the wall, and took a step forward to collapse face first onto his mattress.

But before he let himself fall flat on the ground, he paused, glancing to the left. The screen door between his and Wilbur's room was still in place, and he could see the lights were off past it.

Wilbur was probably fine. But he should probably check on him, just in case.

As quietly as he could, Tommy moved the screen door to the side and poked his head into the room. It was dark, but there was still the faint neon glow from his own room casting long shadows along the floor.

Tommy's gaze trailed to the bed. Sure enough, there was Wilbur, looking deep in sleep as the blankets over him rose and fell in steady rhythm. With a soft sigh, he rolled over so he was facing Tommy, and Tommy stiffened when he realized Wilbur wasn't wearing his mask.

Of course that made sense. He wasn't going to wear that uncomfortable thing when he was sleeping. Plus, his eyes were closed, so Tommy was *pretty sure* he wasn't going to get cursed. But it was the first time Tommy had actually seen his face in full.

Yes, Wilbur was older than him by more than a few years. But he wasn't *old*. He was younger than a lot of the Deathlings, and Tommy was sharply reminded of that seeing Wilbur's sleeping face.

He tried to imagine it. Being fourteen years old, told you were the vessel for a Goddess and no one ever asking for your name again. No one even being able to look at your full face. People seeing him as more of a title than an actual person.

It sounded horrible. How the fuck did Wilbur do it?

After a few seconds of silence, Tommy forced himself to put the screen back in place and head back into his own room. He flopped onto his mattress, sinking into the blankets and burying his face in his pillow.

He stayed like that for a few moments, letting his sore muscles relax against the mattress. Then, he forced himself to flip onto his back, and looked up at the neon wings painted onto his wall.

"Kristin," he started, putting his thumb on the Deathling mark on his wrist, "I know Wilbur is Clara's, but d'you think you can just, I dunno, look out for him? Or maybe talk to Clara? I dunno if you guys talk, but if you do, can you see if She can just... I guess help him somehow?"

The mark glowed a soft purple, and Tommy could feel the magic buzzing through it, turning his skin cold. Kristin was listening.

"I don't really know what I'm asking. I guess I just feel bad for Wil, so, um, if you could do what you could for him that'd be great."

The Deathling mark grew a bit colder under his thumb. It felt like a blessedly cool hand was wrapping around his wrist, holding it gently, like a reassurance. Tommy grinned at the sign

his Goddess had heard his prayer.

“Thanks Lady D, I’m gonna go to sleep now,” Tommy said, letting go of his wrist. The cool touch quickly faded, and the glowing from his mark subsided until it was back to looking like a normal tattoo.

As Tommy closed his eyes and nestled into his blankets to sleep, he could’ve sworn he felt cool lips being pressed against his forehead.

Then, he was swallowed by the darkness.

Chapter End Notes

phil and techno: how did you get the pythia to come with you willingly
tommy: well you see, I'm like 90% sure he's got religious trauma and here's why

anyway I hope you guys enjoyed this! I really love this universe and had a ton of fun coming up with the different descriptions for the environments. it's quite tricky trying to make sure i have an even blend of fantasy and cyberpunk elements, and I think it creates some really cool aesthetics overall

also quick note I wanna make: I'm well aware c!wilbur is not a religious character, so it might feel ooc to have wilbur be so pious in this fic. that's intentional. next chapter goes into a little more wilbur's ideas about religion and what he was forced to follow vs what his natural inclinations towards religion actually are. at this point in the fic, wilbur relies on Clara for guidance because it's been ingrained into him that he has to rely on Her, that he has to follow Her in all ways, this has been pounded into his head since he was 14. I swear I know how to write c!wilbur as a character I have reasoning for this stuff lmao

oh and guess what, I have a playlist for this lol. if you wanna see what I was mostly listening to when I wrote this, go check it out [here](#)

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees !

flicking fire like saltwater

Chapter Summary

Wilbur gets a tour.

Chapter Notes

hello yes to all my ao3 subscribers I'm sure you've been seeing a lot of me the past few days!

this last chapter marks the end of my backlog, which I did not intend to build up but I had a major writing week so I had a lot to post! Anyway, I love this au so much, it's so much fun for me to explore so I really hope you guys enjoy this last bit for now

again this isn't beta'd, I kinda just am writing this really self indulgently for fun so if you see typos uhh sorry lol

anyway hope you guys enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Wilbur woke up to a loud voice calling his name.

“Wil! Wilburrrr!” Tommy whined, the sound of his own name making Wilbur flinch as he blinked awake. “Wake up!”

When Wilbur’s eyes fluttered open, for a moment, he was confused as to where he was. The metal and stone walls were unfamiliar to him, as was the thin mattress that was digging into his back in all the wrong spots.

Then, he heard footsteps walking towards him, and it all came flooding back.

“Tommy, my eyes!” Wilbur shouted, squeezing his eyes shut again as he bolted upright in fear. His hands flew to his face, and he kept his head down as he listened to the footsteps falter.

“Oh shit, sorry! I forgot,” Tommy said, and Wilbur guessed he was standing only a few feet away from the bed.

“You didn’t see my eyes, did you?” Wilbur asking, his heart pounding in his ears.

“No! I didn’t, I swear. I mean, I saw your eyes closed, but that doesn’t count, right?”

Wilbur breathed a sigh of relief, but his shoulders stayed hunched up to his ears. “That- That’s fine, yeah. You just can’t look into my eyes.” Making sure to keep his eyes firmly shut, he reached out a hand in the direction Tommy’s voice was coming from. “Can you hand me my mask?”

There was the sound of shuffling, and then cool metal was being gently placed into his palm.

Screwing his eyes shut as tight as he could, Wilbur dropped his other hand from his face as he slid the mask on. He touched the skin around his eyes, making sure nothing was visible, before he finally blinked them open again.

When Wilbur looked up, he saw Tommy staring at him with his eyebrows furrowed, like he was worried. Good. He should’ve been worried. He’d almost been cursed.

“Morning,” Wilbur said weakly, nearly collapsing back onto the bed as his heart rate slowed down to a normal pace.

“Uh, good morning. Though it’s technically noon, so I dunno if it’s really morning anymore,” Tommy responded, flashing a grin at him. “How’d you sleep?”

Wilbur shrugged. “It was fine I guess.” He paused, and there was a pregnant silence between them that Wilbur immediately recognized as Tommy wanting to ask The question, but not sure how to go about it. “I didn’t have any future visions,” he added, figuring he might as well make it easy on the kid.

“Do you usually get them every night?” Tommy asked, frowning at him.

“No, I don’t. There’s not really a way to predict when I’ll get one, but I’ve gone months without having a single one before.” Those empty months were always something Wilbur dreaded. Dream hated when Wilbur didn’t have a vision for long periods of time, and would question him relentlessly if something had gone wrong, like he was worried Clara had revoked Her blessing from Wilbur for no reason.

He waited for Tommy’s disappointment to set him. For his lips to twist with frustration like others always had when Wilbur didn’t have any future visions to report.

But instead, Tommy actually smiled wider. “Oh, that’s good! I was worried that, like, there was something wrong.”

Oh. That... hadn’t been what Wilbur was expecting.

“I don’t think there’s anything wrong,” he reassured Tommy. “I, uh, think I’d know if there was something wrong with my connection to Her.”

Tommy nodded, believing him immediately. “You’re the expert here, so if you say things are pog, then that sounds good to me.” Wilbur had no idea what ‘pog’ meant, but he decided not to ask about it. “Anyway, you ready to go get breakfast?”

Wilbur blinked, remembering that he hadn't eaten since before the ball the night before. As if his own body had forgotten this as well, his stomach suddenly growled, and Wilbur ducked his head as Tommy snorted.

"I'll take that as a yes," Tommy said, holding a hand out to him.

Glancing back up, Wilbur reached out to take Tommy's hand, but paused when his gaze flickered over Tommy's arms.

The night before, Tommy had been wearing long sleeves with his guard uniform. But now he was wearing a t-shirt, and Wilbur could see his bare arms for the first time. That shouldn't have been something that Wilbur took note of, if not for the fact that Tommy's arms were *covered* in tattoos.

Unlike Phil's, which had clearly been more for art than any kind of enchantment, Tommy's tattoos were all different kinds of sigils. Dark Swirls and circles and sharp edges were scattered around his pale skin, creating an array of different sigils that had Wilbur openly gawking. While he was familiar with sigil tattoos, it was rare to see someone have more than three or four. Tommy had at least eight, and that was only on the visible parts of his arms.

"Holy shit, you have a lot of sigils," Wilbur said, eyes wide as he grabbed Tommy's hand.

Tommy yanked him to his feet, before dropping his hand and beaming as he stretched one of his arms out so Wilbur could see the tattoos better. "Sure do! Niki did 'em all for me!"

"I thought most people were limited to, like, five max before the magic put too much strain on their bodies?" Wilbur asked, frowning at Tommy.

"Well, that's the case with most people. But according to Niki and Phil, my magic is 'unusually strong', which means I can handle a shit ton of sigil marks," Tommy declared proudly.

Blinking twice, Wilbur's eyes fell to the individual sigils. "What do they all do?"

"Well, I got one for strength boosting," Tommy began, pointing at a sharp looking sigil, "got one to help me heal faster. Got one for pain numbing in case I get hurt. Also have one for magic boosting, which seems a little redundant, but it helps me do my heart control shit. Just stuff like that." Then, Tommy dropped his arms. "What about you? You got any sigils?"

Swallowing down a lump in his throat, Wilbur shook his head. "Um, no. No sigil tattoos."

Tommy frowned, like he wanted to ask why Wilbur didn't have any tattoos. But he must've seen something in Wilbur's face that made him decide against it, because he just gestured for Wilbur to follow him. "Well, I don't know about you, but I'm starving. So let's head out."

Nodding, Wilbur grabbed the yellow windbreaker off the floor and tugged it back over his undershirt. Then, he followed Tommy out of the room, letting the door slam shut behind them.

Like the first time he walked through the cavern, the place was abuzz with activity. People walked by carrying crates and complex-looking devices, all seeming to know exactly what they were doing and where they were going. He got a few stares as he trailed behind Tommy, but no one approached them, seemingly warding off by Tommy's sharp glares whenever someone's gaze lingered for a bit too long.

They turned down a tunnel away from the main cavern. The walls here were completely made of stone, with more of the purple fireflies lighting up the entire space like buzzing stars. That wasn't the only light in the tunnels though. There were also murals painted along the stone, made of glowing, neon paint in shades of pink and blue that hummed with soft magic.

The murals were all different. Some were sigils that Wilbur guessed were supposed to act as protective wards. Others were paintings of wings, skulls, crows—things he imagined were tied with the Goddess of Death.

Finally, the tunnel opened back up. The smell of roasting meat and sweet pastries wafted through the air, and Wilbur's stomach growled again as they made their way into what could only be described as a cafeteria.

This cavern wasn't as big as the first, but it was still an unusually large cave. Rugs were scattered all over the ground, and Wilbur noticed a few people sitting on the rugs to eat, with large plates set in the center that everyone seemed to be allowed to take food from. Although there weren't that many people in the cafeteria, the sounds of laughter and soft murmurs filled the air, echoing off the walls and blending together until the voices reminded Wilbur of a babbling creek.

Tommy wove between the occupied rugs with practiced ease. Wilbur followed, doing his best to not step on anyone by accident. A part of him wondered where they were going, until Wilbur noticed two boys sitting on a rug near the back of the cafeteria, both waving Tommy over excitedly.

"Tommy!" The boy sitting closer to them had bleached blonde hair that fell over his face, with dark roots spilling out from the top of it. He was grinning as Tommy clambered over to him, and when he turned his face a bit more, Wilbur realized that the left half of his face seemed to be covered in thick, rosey burn scars.

"Tubbo, my man!" Tommy crowed, dropping to his knees on the rug and bumping his shoulder against the boy's.

"It's about time you fucking woke up. We were almost wondering if you were gonna even show up!" Tubbo scolded him, lightly swatting his arm.

"Oh, like you wouldn't sleep for twenty-four hours straight if you could—" he paused, and Wilbur noticed him take a wheezing breath, "-get away with it," Tommy finished, sitting down properly next to the boy.

Wilbur stood awkwardly at the edge of the rug, unsure of what he was supposed to do. Tommy seemed to realize this at the same time Wilbur did, because he immediately patted the spot on the rug next to him. "You can sit here, Wil."

As if noticing him for the first time, Tubbo's head whipped towards Wilbur as he awkwardly sat down next to Tommy. "Holy shit, is that—"

"This is Wilbur, and yes, he's the Pythia," Tommy introduced, cutting Tubbo off.

Tubbo blinked, and now looking at him straight on, Wilbur realized Tubbo's left eye glowed an unnatural shade of yellow—obviously cybernetic. "Damn, you're not really what I expected."

Before Wilbur could even try to figure out what to say to that, another voice sounded behind him. "Well, what did you expect him to look like, Tubbo?"

Oh yeah, there had been two boys sitting on the rug. Glancing over his shoulder, Wilbur had to fight the urge to flinch back when he saw the other person sitting across from him.

Even sitting down, Wilbur could tell that this kid was tall. Possibly even taller than him. His hair was a perfect split of black and white, and it nearly fell down to his shoulders with part of it being pulled back into a ponytail.

What startled Wilbur so bad he nearly flinched though wasn't any of this. It was his cybernetics.

His eyes were clearly both implants, with one being a bright shade of red, and the other being a softer shade of green that still glowed in an unnatural way. The entire right side of his face was unnaturally stretched, with dark wires snaking their way under his skin like bulging veins. The wires trailed down his neck and under his shirt, with his short-sleeved shirt revealing a cybernetic right arm made of the same netherite that Tommy's hand was. His pants seemed just a tad too short for him, with one of the legs of his jeans pulling up ever so slightly to reveal his right ankle was also made of netherite. If Wilbur had to guess, he'd say his entire right leg was probably a prosthetic as well.

"I don't know, I thought he'd be more, like, regal looking I guess?"

Tubbo's voice startled Wilbur out of his shock. He blinked a few times, shaking himself off and dropping his eyes to the food in the middle of the rug.

A large metal plate sat loaded with what looked like freshly-baked biscuits, some strips of dark meat Wilbur didn't recognize, a pile of small, thin cookies in an array of bright colors, some kind of jelly-like sauce, and a few gel capsules.

Tommy had made himself busy grabbing one of the biscuits, dipping it in the jelly and taking a large bite with crumbs pouring down onto the rug below him. "You should've seen him at the ball," Tommy said after he swallowed. "His outfit was ridiculous! I made him change so he wouldn't stick out like a sore thumb on the back of my bike."

Tubbo grimaced at the crumbs now staining the front of Tommy's shirt. "You're so gross, man."

"Oi! Fuck you, I'm not gross!" Tommy protested. "Let a man eat his breakfast, bitch!"

As the two devolved into an argument about how gross Tommy was, Wilbur felt a finger lightly tap his shoulder, and jumped.

It seemed the boy with the black and white hair had scooted over a bit so he could lean closer to Wilbur, but still kept a fair amount of space between them. "Sorry about those two. They can start going at it pretty easily," he said, giving him a shy smile. "I'm Ranboo. It's nice to meet you, Wilbur."

"Nice to meet you too," Wilbur said, fiddling with his hands in his lap as he glanced back over at the food.

"Are you wondering what the meat is?" Ranboo asked, keeping his voice low while Tubbo and Tommy continued to bicker.

"Yeah, I have no clue what that is," Wilbur admitted.

Ranboo huffed out a soft laugh. "It's just some kind of artificial meat, the same stuff you can find street vendors selling. It only looks weird because Techno has this whole secret sauce recipe he fries it with, so it makes it dark."

"Techno cooked this?" Wilbur asked, surprised that someone that seemed to be as high up as him was apparently the cook.

"Yup. He's one of the best cooks here, actually," Ranboo told him. "You should try it. It's really good."

With some hesitation, Wilbur reached forward to take one of the strips of meat from the plate. It had a similar texture to bacon, but when he took a bite, his eyes widened at the vibrant spices that didn't taste a single thing like bacon.

Admittedly, Wilbur couldn't remember the last time he had artificial meat, but he would definitely say this was pretty good compared to his very faint memories. In the palace, they'd always had real meat, which was a luxury to those who lived in the city.

"Damn, this is really good," Wilbur said, taking another bite.

"Yo, Wilbur!" Turning his head, Wilbur saw Tubbo staring at him with narrowed eyes. "We heard you went with Tommy willingly. Why the hell did you do that?"

The words immediately fizzled out on his tongue, having forgotten this was something he was probably going to have to explain to everyone they met.

Tommy, thankfully, answered before Wilbur even had to struggle to come up with a response. "The palace was shit and Dream didn't listen to his advice, so when I offered him a way out he came with me."

"Dream didn't listen to you?" Ranboo asked, furrowing his brows.

Shrugging, Wilbur took another bite of the meat. "Not really. Not if he didn't like what my advice was."

“But you can see the future, right?” Tubbo asked. “Why the hell would you not listen to the advice of the dude who can literally predict how things are gonna go?”

Wilbur huffed. “Dream doesn’t like being told if he did something wrong. He’s arrogant, and thinks of himself as the only one in the right.”

“What a dick,” Tubbo snorted.

Ranboo gasped. “Tubbo! You can’t say that about the king!”

Tubbo gave Ranboo a flat stare. “We’re literally terrorists. Do you think I have any respect for the king?”

Tommy and Wilbur both snorted at this in unison. As Ranboo struggled to defend himself, there was a gentle nudging in Wilbur’s side, and when he glanced over, he saw Tommy holding a biscuit out to him. “These are really good. Niki made them, and she’s the best at baking stuff.”

Murmuring a thank you, Wilbur took the offered biscuit. When he bit into it, the bread crumbled into flaky bits in his mouth, with butter melting on his tongue. While the meat was good, this was *amazing*. Not better than the baked goods he’d gotten in the palace, but pretty damn close to it.

“So Wil, what’s up with the fancy mask?” Tubbo suddenly asked.

“Uh, you’ll get cursed if you look into a Pythia’s eyes. This is enchanted for me to see through,” Wilbur explained after he swallowed his bite of biscuit.

“Cursed?!” Tubbo exclaimed. “That’s so fucking cool! You can curse people just by looking at them!”

Wilbur couldn’t stop himself from flinching at Tubbo’s words. There was nothing cool about the curse. It had been something that Wilbur was terrified of ever since he woke up from his first vision dream. That one day he could just open his eyes at the wrong moment, or his blindfold could fall off, and he would doom someone to an early grave. He would be responsible for some innocent person’s death, just because of his eyes.

“It’s not cool,” Wilbur said quietly, staring at his hands. “It’s actually fucking terrifying. Knowing that with just one fuck up, I could shorten someone’s life—that I’d basically be responsible for their death.”

While Ranboo grimaced and Tommy shot a glare Tubbo’s way, Tubbo just shrugged. “Sorry, I just always forget you outsiders are so touchy about death.”

“What do you mean ‘touchy about death’? Does worshipping the Goddess of Death just mean you don’t care when people die?” Wilbur asked, furrowing his brows.

“It’s not like that,” Tommy interjected. “We *do* care when people die, but we also see it as a gift. You’ve finally done what you were put here to do, and now you’ve returned to Our Lady’s embrace.”

It was odd, hearing Tommy talk about the worship of Kristin. While Wilbur had known from the beginning that he was a Deathling, so far, he hadn't actually mentioned anything specific about his beliefs. If anything, Wilbur would say he didn't seem all that pious at all.

"I suppose I get that, but I still don't see how me having the ability to permanently shorten someone's lifespan is a good thing," Wilbur said after a few moments. "Wouldn't that mean they're returning to Your Lady before they're supposed to?"

"Not possible. Kristin doesn't take anyone unless She thinks it's their time," Tommy explained, leaning back on his hands.

"But- But the curse says if someone looks into my eyes, they'll die an early death. One they weren't supposed to have shortened otherwise," Wilbur pointed out.

Tommy shrugged. "Kristin knows when everyone is supposed to die. It's something She decides the minute a person is born. So if someone dies early because of your curse, it's because She decided that was going to be their cause of death long before they saw your eyes."

Wilbur's frown deepened. "That doesn't make sense. Clara is the one who knows the future, She's the one who knows when people are supposed to die. Kristin can't know that."

"Well, She fuckin' does-"

"Maybe let's not debate religion over breakfast," Ranboo cut in, glancing nervously between Wilbur and Tommy.

While Wilbur wanted to try and debate more about this because the idea of Kristin knowing the future when that was Clara's domain just didn't make sense- he could also tell that this was going to become more of an argument than it should've been.

One of the things Wilbur had had to learn the hard way when he became Pythia was that a tendency to question the worship he engaged in was not a desirable trait in the Pythia. When he was younger and first being taught about Clara and his role as Pythia by the former Pythia, he had frequently questioned *why* certain things were the way they were, why the rituals were necessary or if the history he was taught was actually what happened.

The former Pythia had been patient with him, but warned him in a stern voice that that kind of questioning wasn't welcome. The traditions had been followed for centuries, and they weren't something you were supposed to prod at. His belief and worship in Clara was supposed to be unquestioning, unbreakable, and void of any doubt. It had been a bitter pill for him to swallow, but he managed it all the same.

But now he could feel that same curiosity—that same *doubt* rising up in him again. He needed to shove it down. Not let it fester. The Deathlings had their own ideas about Kristin, and even if they clashed with what he'd been taught about Clara, it wasn't his place to try and debate that. His belief was the correct one. That was all he needed to hold onto.

The rest of breakfast passed in bursts of random conversation. Wilbur went back to eating the biscuits and meat, while Tommy loudly tried to convince Tubbo to build him a jetpack. Apparently, Tubbo was an engineer, and was being mentored under the Deathlings head cybernetics engineer—Sam. Ranboo only chimed in every once in a while, seemingly content to just listen to his friends and occasionally flash a kind smile Wilbur’s way.

Once the plate had been cleared of food, Ranboo picked it up and said he would go drop it off to be cleaned. Tubbo told Tommy he was getting a headache because of his ears—which was a sentence Wilbur didn’t understand in the slightest but didn’t ask for clarification on—and left to go work on whatever project he was currently engrossed in.

This left Wilbur alone with Tommy again. A part of Wilbur was worried that Tommy was annoyed with him because of the discussion on Kristin and Clara before, but Tommy didn’t mention it as he led Wilbur back out of the cafeteria, instead excitedly chatting about giving Wilbur the grand tour.

“So this entire place was originally a natural cave system, right?” Tommy was telling him as he guided him back down the tunnel into the main cavern. “Then, it was hollowed out more to make the rooms bigger and stuff, and we reinforced the walls with metal where the rock was a bit unstable. Over time we’ve just continued to expand it, so this place is always growing.”

They made it back to the main cavern, which was still bustling with just as much activity as before. When Wilbur tilted his head back to see the spires jutting out from the ceiling that were criss-crossed by those long wires, he gasped when he realized there was a person standing *on* one of the wires.

“Holy shit, there’s a guy up there!” Wilbur exclaimed, pointing to the red-headed man who was balancing on the wire with practiced ease as he ducked below the rock spires.

Tommy glanced up, and let out a sharp laugh when his eyes fell on the guy. “Oh yeah, that’s Fundy! Those wires help connect power to different parts of the caves, so he’s just doing some repairs.”

“That’s so high up though. What if he falls?” Wilbur asked, heart skipping a beat when Fundy jumped to tap a rock spire, the wire beneath him rippling with the weight.

“Nah, he’s not gonna fall. He’s got this cool type of muscle wire net implant, and it gives him an insane amount of control over his balance and shit. The guy is basically a circus acrobat, but even better.” They stepped directly underneath the part of the wire Fundy was standing on, and before Wilbur could realize what Tommy was doing, he was cupping his hands over his mouth and calling up. “Fundy! What’s up!”

Looking down, Fundy met Tommy’s eyes and grinned. Then, in a move that almost made Wilbur shriek, Fundy fell backwards. He caught himself on the wire by his legs, and hung upside down right over their heads.

“Sup Tommy!” Fundy greeted, and Wilbur noticed his red hair was streaked with white as it hung around his face. “Is this the Pythia?”

“Yup! This is Wilbur. Wilbur, meet Fundy,” Tommy introduced.

Wilbur had to crane his neck back to meet Fundy’s eyes. Now with a better look at him, he realized Fundy could only have been a few years older than Tommy at most. His features were sharp and pointed, with dark brown eyes that reminded Wilbur of a fox.

“Nice to meet you, Wilbur! Like the mask, looks pretty sick,” Fundy said, grinning at him.

“Thanks,” Wilbur responded, not bothering to tell Fundy he wouldn’t be wearing the gaudy thing if he had another choice. “Nice... acrobatics.”

Fundy chuckled. “Thanks, man. If you ever wanna try it out, feel free to climb on up here and I can show you some tricks. It’s a lot of fun.”

Wilbur gulped. “Um, no thanks. I like staying on the ground.”

“Fair enough!” In one swift motion, Fundy flipped himself over the wire so he was hanging onto it with his hands, and pulled himself back up so he was standing on top of it once again. “I gotta get back to it, but I’ll talk to you guys later!”

“Later!” Tommy called. And then, he was grabbing Wilbur’s wrist again and dragging him away from the wires.

As they headed through the main cavern, Tommy made a sharp turn down into another long tunnel, similar to the one that led to the cafeteria. This one was quite a bit bigger than the cafeteria tunnel though, with room for multiple people to walk through side by side. Neon graffiti still lit up the stone, and Wilbur absently brushed his fingers along one of the wing paintings as they passed by.

“So Fundy can do all that acrobatic stuff because of his wire net implant over his, uh, muscles?” Wilbur asked, struggling to remember if he’d heard of a cybernetic enhancement like that before.

Tommy nodded. “Pretty much! Though he did that kind of stuff even before Sam gave him that enhancement. The wire net just made him even better at it.”

“So Sam just... gives you guys whatever cybernetic implants you want?” Wilbur asked, having to duck when they passed under a low point in the tunnel ceiling.

“Kind of. We don’t have unlimited supplies or anything, so it’s kind of whatever he deems necessary. Like I’ve been begging him for cybernetic eyes, but he and Ponk both say it’s too risky of a surgery to do unless you actually need it,” Tommy explained, scoffing a bit. “Ponk is our doctor here. Sam builds all the cybernetics, and then Ponk does the actual surgery part of it.”

It was reassuring to hear that they had an actual doctor performing the actual enhancements on all of them. Although that was the recommendation for getting any cybernetic implant, Wilbur had heard plenty of cases where the cybernetics engineer themselves would just perform the procedures, even if they weren’t licensed doctors.

“Wait, if it’s only necessary stuff, how was Fundy’s wire net necessary?” Wilbur asked after a moment.

“Well, it’s *usually* whatever’s necessary. But Sam likes to experiment with building enhancements people have never even heard of before, and sometimes he needs people to test them out on. Fundy volunteered to try out the wire net, which is how he ended up with it.”

Wilbur blinked. “Your engineer tests out his cybernetic prototypes on you guys?” He asked, unable to keep some of the horror from leaking into his voice.

“It’s on a volunteer basis only, and Sam makes sure we know all the risks before we do it. Anything that people, like, actually need are only cybernetics that have been tested a shit ton and are known to work just fine,” Tommy reassured him, waving his prosthetic hand around like he was waving Wilbur’s worries away. “Fundy is one of the only ones here who actually has a prototype like that. Most people don’t wanna risk it.”

“I can understand why,” Wilbur muttered, shaking his head as he tried to imagine it. The idea of cybernetics alone was already a little anxiety-inducing for him, considering he didn’t have any kinds of implants whatsoever. But letting a prototype get implanted *into* your body? That was terrifying. “Where are we going anyway?”

“Well, we’re actually on our way to Sam’s workshop, but we’re just passing by. We’re going to see Niki so we can get you a new blindfold,” Tommy told him. Up ahead, Wilbur saw a brighter light shining, and Tommy picked up his walking speed. “Oh, there we are!”

The tunnel opened up into a larger cave, but not a cavern like the other openings they’d been in before. This seemed to be more of a middleman type of room, with three doorways leading into different, seemingly larger caves.

The one on the far right seemed to be a room filled with stone tables, scrap metal strewn all around, and floating lights far brighter than any lighting Wilbur had seen in the caves since he got here. Wilbur could hear a man talking to someone inside the room, and when he passed by the doorway, Wilbur only got a glimpse of dark green hair before he disappeared again.

“That’s Sam’s workshop,” Tommy whispered to him. “Then right next to it is Ponk’s clinic,” he continued, pointing to the doorway right next to the workshop. In that room, Wilbur didn’t hear anyone talking, but he could see more bright lights and a few beds shoved against walls.

Then, Tommy was grabbing Wilbur’s wrist and dragging him towards the doorway on the far left. “Niki’s is over here,” he said, guiding him towards the cave.

Wilbur had to duck under the archway to go into the room. Once he was fully inside he was able to straighten up again, and paused to take a look at the space.

It seemed... kind of like a tattoo parlor, if Wilbur had to compare it to something. The walls were covered in more intricate, neon paintings, but also some framed designs of sigils and runes that obviously were more for decoration than they were for actual magic. There was a large, leather chair that reminded Wilbur of the kind you would find in a dentist’s office, with

a metal tray floating next to it. On one wall, Wilbur noticed a large bookshelf absolutely filled with books on enchanting and runic language. There was a table pressed against another wall, and Wilbur saw bottles of ink lined up neatly, along with some kind of waxy paper and pens stacked beside the ink.

In the back of the room, there was another desk. This one was actually occupied, and Wilbur saw the back of a head of short pink hair hunched over, clearly focused as they worked on something Wilbur couldn't see.

"Niki!" Tommy called out as soon as they stepped inside.

The pink-haired person glanced over her shoulder, and Wilbur realized this must've been Niki. She grinned when she saw Tommy, immediately spinning around in her chair to push to her feet and greet them.

"Tommy! Glad to see you made it back in one piece," Niki said, wiping her hands off on her pants as she walked across the room.

Wilbur's eyes were immediately drawn to her arms. Niki was wearing a dark grey tank top, showing the full extent of the netherite prosthetic arms that meshed into the skin of her shoulders. Like Tommy's prosthetic, her arms were covered in an array of flower and vine carvings. The metal of her fingers was coated in lapis dust, and her black pants were stained with the shimmering, bright blue gemstone powder. On her collarbone, Wilbur noticed the dark wings of the Deathling mark sticking out against her pale skin.

"Of course I made it back! I'm such a Big Man, a mission like this was no problem for me!" Tommy declared, puffing out his chest proudly.

Niki giggled, reaching out to pull Tommy into a hug. He had to hunch down a bit to hug her properly, and Niki rolled her eyes at the height difference before lightly shoving him back.

Then, as soon as she was no longer hugging Tommy, her pale grey eyes flickered over to Wilbur. Immediately, her smile softened, and she held out a hand for him to shake. "You're Wilbur, right?"

Wilbur blinked, startled by someone knowing his name without Tommy introducing him, but shook himself out of it as he took her hand. "Uh, yeah. I'm the Pythia."

Niki's metal fingers were surprisingly warm against his own, and when she dropped his hand, he noticed some of the lapis dust had transferred onto his fingers. "Well, obviously I know that," Niki teased gently. "Techno told me you'd probably be coming by today. You need a new blindfold, right?"

It was a relief to not have to explain it all to yet another person, so he nodded gratefully at Niki. "Yeah, this thing is a little, uh-"

"Much?" Niki offered. Wilbur nodded, and she gave him an understanding look. "Yeah, seems a bit heavy too. I just need to measure your face and I can enchant something much

better for you.” Taking a step back, Niki gestured to the dentist chair he’d noticed earlier. “If you want, you can sit there so I can take your measurements?”

Wilbur moved over to the chair, settling himself on the edge because he was unsure if he needed to lay down fully or not. Tommy, meanwhile, grabbed a spare chair from the corner to drag over so he could sit next to Wilbur.

Niki headed back over to her desk in the back, fiddling with some papers and other things he couldn’t see from where he was sitting. A minute later she came back over, settling herself in the chair right next to Wilbur’s, and set some measuring tape, lapis, and a black marker on the metal tray.

“Okay, can you take your mask off for me?” Niki asked.

Stiffening, Wilbur made a choked noise and had to cough to clear his throat. “Uh, you, um, you know why I have to wear the mask, right?”

“Yeah, the curse, right? Techno told me about it,” Niki said, as if it was obvious. “You can just keep your eyes closed, right? I need to be able to measure your face without that mask in the way.”

Wilbur thought back to when he was first measured for his mask after receiving his first future vision. They had sent one of the oldest attendants in the entire palace to take the measurements, and the entire time, the old man’s hands had trembled violently. He had been terrified of Wilbur opening his eyes. Everyone was.

But Niki didn’t seem afraid at all. She just was staring at him expectantly, like she didn’t understand why he was so surprised.

“You... You’re not scared I’m going to open my eyes?” He asked, cringing at how quiet his voice was.

Next to him, he heard Tommy make a wounded noise, while something pained flashed over Niki’s face. “Of course I’m not afraid. I don’t think you’d do that on purpose.”

“But- I could get startled and just open them by accident,” Wilbur tried to explain.

“Wil, the fact that you’re so worried about this is just telling me you’re going to try really hard not to let that happen,” Niki said, her soft smile returning.

“If it makes you feel better,” Tommy suddenly jumped in, leaning over so his elbow was resting on the dentist chair, “if you look like you’re going to open your eyes, I can slap my hand over your face.”

Despite the anxiety humming through him, Wilbur couldn’t help but snort at that. “Knowing you, you’d give me a black eye with how hard you hit me.”

“Not like anyone will know because you’ll be wearing a blindfold,” Tommy shot back, smirking at him.

Laughing again, the tension trickled out of Wilbur's shoulders. The idea of letting Niki poke around his face without any kind of shield between her eyes and his still freaked him out, but it would only be for a few minutes, right? Plus, Tommy would be ready to block his eyes if needed. It wasn't a foolproof plan, but Wilbur really wanted to be able to take off his current mask.

"Okay," Wilbur agreed after a moment. "Just be ready, Tommy."

"You got it," Tommy said, straightening up and holding his hands out.

Taking a breath to steady himself, Wilbur closed his eyes and reached up to pull the mask off. There was a moment of silence after he set the mask down next to him, and he wondered what Niki was doing.

"You're young," Niki whispered after a few seconds.

Even though his eyes were closed, Wilbur furrowed his brows. "How old did you think I was?"

"Thirties, maybe?" Niki offered, and Wilbur scrunched up his face at that.

"Wow, do I really look that old?"

Niki huffed, and he heard some shuffling from what he guessed was in the direction of the metal tray. "The mask makes it hard to tell. Plus, I didn't expect the Pythia to be young at all."

"He's twenty-three!" Tommy chimed in from Wilbur's right side.

"Huh, you're only two years older than me," Niki murmured. There was some more shuffling, and then, "okay, I'm gonna start touching your face now. Just letting you know so it doesn't startle you."

"Thank you," Wilbur said, grateful for the warning.

Smooth metal pressed against his cheeks, and Wilbur listened as the tape measure was stretched over his eyes. He could feel Tommy hovering at his side, ready to slap his hands over Wilbur's face at any second. It was surprisingly reassuring, having Tommy ready to block his face if anything happened, and Wilbur felt his heartbeat slow.

"So Niki, you're the head enchanter here?" Wilbur asked after a few moments, feeling awkward just sitting in silence as Niki poked at his face.

"I am," Niki hummed, and Wilbur felt cool plastic gently press against his eyes. "Magic symbols—like runes or sigils—are my specialty. I enchant the cybernetics Sam makes with runes, and I also can design sigils. So all the sigil tattoos you see are from me too."

"You don't just do sigil tattoos though," Tommy cut in. "You've done pretty much everyone's Deathling marks, and also all the normal tattoos people have, like Phil's."

“I haven’t done *all* of Phil’s tattoos,” Niki corrected with a soft laugh. “He had quite a few already from other tattoo artists when I joined the Deathlings.”

“How long ago did you join?” Wilbur asked, eyebrows twitching when Niki poked his temples.

“I was fifteen, so six years ago now I’m pretty sure,” Niki explained, and he heard the marker get uncapped.

Wilbur waited as the cool marker ink was pressed against his temples. “Can I ask why you joined? I don’t really know what the recruitment process is for, uh, Deathlings.”

Niki’s hands paused, and a silence fell over the three of them, the air turning thick with tension. Although Wilbur kept his eyes shut, he could practically feel Niki and Tommy exchanging strange looks.

“Shit, did I say something wrong?”

“Oh, uh, not exactly,” Niki quickly answered. “It’s just- you don’t know anything about the Deathlings, I forgot, so of course you don’t know, um-”

“Why people join is kind of a personal thing,” Tommy cut in, saving Niki from her stammering. “It’s not something you really ask. Here in the group, it’s something you usually wait for someone to tell you on their own.”

Oh god. He already fucked up.

“Fuck, I’m sorry. Forget I asked,” Wilbur said, clenching his jaw.

“It’s okay. You didn’t know,” Niki reassured him, and she resumed taking her measurements. “I know that sounds confusing, but have you noticed how a lot of us here seem to have cybernetic prosthetics or implants?” Wilbur nodded. “Well, this isn’t the case for everyone, but the time when most people start feeling like they have a connection to the Goddess of Death is after having gone through a near death experience. And usually near death experiences mean you get injured, and injuries mean you typically need cybernetics, so...” she trailed off.

Oh.

“That- shit, I’m sorry,” Wilbur stammered, realizing he’d just essentially asked Niki to talk about something that was—presumably—very traumatic for her.

“Like I said, you didn’t know,” Niki told him, her fingers finally dropping from his face. “Here, hold your hands out.”

Wilbur did as she said, and he felt his heavy gold mask being placed back into his hands. “Put this back on. It’s gonna take me a few minutes to enchant.”

Putting the mask back on his face, Wilbur checked to make sure his eyes were completely covered before blinking them open once again. Niki had already moved back over to her

desk, and was hunched over as the smell of lapis dust filled the air.

“Kinda bummed I didn’t get to smack you in the face,” Tommy joked.

Turning to face him, Wilbur saw Tommy still smirking at him, fiddling with the fingers of his prosthetic like he seemed to often do. Wilbur’s eyes lingered on the prosthetic, and remembered what Tommy said about Sam only providing cybernetics that were necessary.

Now that he knew, he wasn’t going to ask about it. But Wilbur wondered if he’d ever hear the story behind that all the same.

“You might not make Clara very happy if you did that,” Wilbur shot back, grinning at Tommy.

Tommy snorted. “I’m sure Clara wouldn’t mind. I’m loved by all women, especially Goddesses.”

Wilbur rolled his eyes. “Bit stuck up, aren’t we?”

“It’s not stuck up if it’s the truth,” Tommy replied coolly.

Huffing, Wilbur slumped back against the dentist chair. It was almost strange how easy it was to banter with Tommy. He couldn’t remember the last time he’d joked around and teased someone in that way, but something between him and this kid just clicked.

Once again, Wilbur thought back to the vision he had the night before the ball. Where Clara wanted him to take Tommy’s hand and go with him. He thought that maybe he’d get answers as to why Clara had wanted him to be with the Deathlings when he got to their base, but it’d almost been twenty-four hours since the ball, and he was still no closer to answers than he’d been before.

It would probably take time for Clara to reveal what path She wanted him to take from here. Over the years, Wilbur had grown used to being forced to wait for answers. But with a situation as strange at this, the wait was frustrating to say the least.

“This is the easiest thing I could do with the supplies I had on hand,” Niki suddenly said, standing up and walking back over to the chair. In her hands, she was holding a swath of shimmering gold fabric, and Wilbur could see small runes inscribed in lapis on the edges of the cloth. “If you want a mask made of metal, or maybe even some goggles, let me know and I can ask someone to get the materials for me.”

Taking the offered blindfold, Wilbur ran his fingers over the soft fabric, thinking of how similar it was to the casual blindfolds he’d kept in his drawers back at the palace. “This works fine, thank you.”

Closing his eyes again, he took the metal mask off, and brought the blindfold around his eyes. He tied it quickly, and made sure his eyes were on his lap as he blinked them open again.

The slight fuzz that came with staring through an enchanted blindfold was still there, but Wilbur was startled when it was... less noticeable? Lifting his head, he met Niki’s eyes, and

realized that the pink of her hair seemed just a bit brighter than it had been before as well. Looking over to Tommy, he noticed the runes carved into his prosthetic were clearer than they'd been before, and Wilbur could see a faint shimmering over the hand itself, like he could actually see the physical magic that hovered around the enchantments.

"Holy shit," Wilbur muttered, seeing the same shimmer over each of the sigil tattoos on Tommy's arms. When he glanced back at Niki, he saw the same thing on her prosthetic arms.

"Is that a good holy shit?" Niki asked, giving him a nervous look.

"Yeah, it is," Wilbur laughed a bit, not having realized how drastic of a difference such a subtle improvement made. "It's like- I don't know how you did it, but it's like colors are brighter, and I can see the magic over your enchantments. Also it's not as fuzzy as it usually is with my other masks."

Furrowing her brows, Niki picked up the discarded mask Wilbur had set beside him, and turned it over in her hands. She brought the mask close to her face, peering at the runes, before blinking a few times and pulling back. "No wonder it was fuzzy before. Whoever enchanted your mask didn't seem to know what they were doing."

"The official palace enchanter was the one who did all my blindfolds," Wilbur told her.

Niki raised an eyebrow, clearly unimpressed. "Well they did a shit job of it."

Next to him, Tommy barked out a laugh. "Fucking Death below, Niki! You really think the literal palace enchanter did a bad job?"

"They certainly did a worse job than I would've done," Niki countered. "Runes are constantly being streamlined to help them be more effective in their enchantments. This style hasn't been used in at least ten years. Not to mention, the carving was shoddy work. I feel like whoever did this had shaky hands."

"I mean, considering this blindfold works way better than my last one, I'm inclined to believe you," Wilbur said. "So thank you. Seriously. This is really fantastic."

"Wil, I did that in five minutes. If you gave me more time I could make you a mask that worked even better than your normal eyes did," Niki told him, curling her fingers around the metal mask. "Do you mind if I hold onto this though? I won't do anything to it, I just want to study the runework."

"Go for it. I think that thing is ugly as shit."

Grinning, Niki pushed to her feet with the mask in her hand. "Well, it was a pleasure meeting you, Wilbur. I'd love for you both to stay, but I have work I need to get back to."

"Doing more runework for Sam?" Tommy asked, hopping out of his chair while Wilbur did the same.

"I'm always doing runework for Sam. But I also have a sigil I'm designing for someone."

“Who?” Tommy asked, bouncing on his toes as Niki guided them to the door.

“Ranboo! He asked yesterday to design one for him.”

Tommy frowned. “Wait, Ranboo? I thought he could only handle one sigil.”

“I figured out a way to balance the magic use a bit more, so he can handle a second one,” she told him, leaning against the doorway.

“What’s it for?”

“Pain relief. His prosthetics have been aching a bit more lately,” Niki explained, looking a bit saddened as she told Tommy this.

“Aw damn, that sucks.” Wilbur noticed Tommy flexing the fingers of his prosthetic. “Well, hopefully boob boy takes it well. At least he’ll get a good night’s sleep tonight.” Wilbur wasn’t sure what the connection between Ranboo getting a sigil tattoo and sleeping well was, but before he could voice this, Tommy was already walking out of the room. “Later Niki!”

“Bye guys!” Niki waved as they headed off, and Wilbur waved back before Tommy guided him back down the dark tunnel once more.

Wilbur had no idea where they were going next, but if this cave system was really as big as Tommy was making it out to be, they could spend the entire day just walking around. Tommy didn’t say much as they headed back to the main cavern, but there was nothing stifling about the silence. It was just comfortable, listening to the echo of their shoes against the stone, and the distant sound of voices swelling-

Wait, voices?

The closer they got to the main cavern, the louder the voices got. It was far too loud to just be the normal chatter of people walking around, and Tommy seemed to realize that at the same time Wilbur did, frowning and picking up the pace as they neared the end of the tunnel.

When they re-entered the main cavern, Wilbur jolted at the sight of the crowd gathered. Almost all of the faces were unfamiliar to him, but he noticed Jack and Fundy talking with their heads bowed to each other. Before Wilbur could ask Tommy what was going on though, there was a blur of black and white as Ranboo ran straight at them.

“Tommy! Where did you go?” Ranboo asked, eyes wide as he grabbed Tommy’s shoulder.

“I was at Niki’s! We were getting Wil a new blindfold,” Tommy explained, gesturing to Wilbur’s face. “What the hell is going on?”

Ranboo didn’t say anything. Instead, he just sighed, and pointed to the front of the cavern.

Wilbur hadn’t noticed the giant hologram floating above them before, but there it was, casting a bright pink glow against everyone in the room. When Wilbur realized what the hologram was of though, his mouth went dry.

The hologram was of two faces—Tommy's and Wilbur's. They were both projected against the wall, with the word 'BOUNTY' written above their heads. Wilbur's picture still had him wearing the gold mask he'd just given to Niki. Then, there were more details written underneath each of their faces.

Under Tommy's it read:

Wanted: dead or alive if with second bounty. If alone, only bring back alive.

Meanwhile, under Wilbur's it read:

Wanted: alive and unharmed. If harmed contract will be terminated.

Then, there was a string of numbers for the bounty reward, and Wilbur gulped as he stared at the largest number of credits he'd ever seen written down.

"We have a fucking *bounty* on us?!" Tommy screeched, eyes blown wide.

"This just got posted to the net on the bounty forums less than an hour ago," Ranboo explained, gripping Tommy's shoulder like he was going to fall over. "The poster is anonymous."

Bile rising in his throat, Wilbur wrung his hands in front of him. "It's Dream."

"What?" Ranboo nearly yelped. "Dream's the king! Why would he post a bounty for you?!"

"He's not going to reveal the Pythia has been kidnapped, or else it'll make us look weak compared to other nations, which is why he wants to get me back in a subtle way. But he's the only one who has the wealth to offer that kind of reward."

Wilbur knew he was right. There was no doubt in his mind as he stared at the floating bounty with his face plastered across it. This was Dream's doing.

"Tommy! Wil! There you are," a new voice called out. Phil was pushing his way through the crowd, with Techno trailing close behind. "Where were you two?"

"It's not like we were outside the cave! We were at Niki's for fuck's sake," Tommy scoffed, although Wilbur could see the way his hands were shaking despite his flippant tone.

"Well that's good, because you're not leaving the cave anytime soon," Techno said, folding his arms over his chest. "This bounty is bad news. With a reward like that, every bounty hunter in the city is gonna be hunting for you two."

"So you can't leave the caves at all," Phil continued. "At least not until news of this bounty dies down. The minute you step outside, someone is gonna clock you with facial recognition."

"Wh- Phil, c'mon! With a reward like that, it could take a fucking year for this bounty to die down, maybe even two!" Tommy argued.

“So what, you propose we just turn you both in instead? No way,” Techno huffed, shaking his head.

Wilbur opened his mouth, ready to offer himself to just turn over if it meant keeping his only friend here safe, before he stupidly remembered that they weren’t going to let him leave. He might have gone with Tommy willingly, but he was still kidnapped, and he doubted that they would take too kindly to him offering to go back to the palace.

It was strange how easily he was able to forget that he was kidnapped. Somehow, while unfamiliar to him, he already felt... safe, here with the Deathlings. Maybe not sure of what he was doing, but safe nonetheless.

Shit. This was a problem.

“I mean, it’s not like I have much of a problem with not being able to go out, considering I’d been stuck in the palace for the past nine years,” Wilbur said, twisting his fingers together. “But this isn’t fair to Tommy.”

Tommy gave him a grateful smile, but Phil quickly shook his head.

“Tommy knew the risks when he agreed to take the mission,” Phil said, giving Tommy a pointed look.

“I didn’t think I’d fucking be stuck in here for a year!” Tommy protested.

“This isn’t a punishment, Tommy. If you go outside, your life will be at real risk,” Phil pushed, putting both his hands on Tommy’s shoulders. “Please, I’m not saying this to be cruel. You have to stay inside.”

Wilbur watched Tommy visibly deflate. “But... But if I get killed, isn’t that because Kristin decided it was my time?” Tommy asked, his voice much smaller now.

“Kristin knows when we’re all going to join Her, but She’s never advocated taking unnecessary risks. I’ve taught you this before. Life is a gift, and you can’t waste it.”

Tommy gulped, and Wilbur noticed it almost looked like he was on the verge of tears. “I don’t wanna be trapped again, Phil. I can’t do it. I’ll fucking go crazy.”

“You’re not trapped,” Phil reassured him, placing his hands on Tommy’s cheeks. “You have to hide out here just for a little while. I promise, as soon as we think it’s safe, you’ll be able to go out again.”

When Tommy took another breath, Wilbur heard that same wheezing, though it was louder this time. His eyes widened and he hiccuped once, before he sucked in a much louder, wheezing breath.

Phil’s grip on his shoulders tightened. “Tommy, just breathe. Don’t freak out your implants.” He started doing exaggerated breaths as a guide for Tommy to follow, and Tommy breathed along, the wheezing getting quieter with each passing second.

Wilbur felt like he was intruding on something personal, so he turned back to Techno and Ranboo, who both looked just as troubled as he felt.

“Looks like you’re sticking around for a while,” Techno commented.

“I guess I am,” Wilbur said, although it’s not like he thought he was leaving anytime soon anyway.

“Don’t worry, Wilbur,” Ranboo reassured, giving him a small smile. “I think you’ll like it here.”

Wilbur thought back to yesterday morning, when he’d woken up in a cold sweat with a vision flashing behind his eyes. He thought of his frustration with Dream, the eyes lingering on him at the ball. Then, he thought of Tommy asking him what his name was, and if he was happy. The way it felt like a weight off his chest to tell Tommy that no, he wasn’t happy. Not really.

Then, Wilbur thought of Ranboo and Niki’s warm smiles. Of Tommy’s protective glares, and Phil’s kind voice.

Something brushed against the back of his mind. It was subtle, but it was like there was a presence behind him. Watching him. It was cool, and Wilbur felt the ghost of a hand ruffling his hair.

Despite all logic, Wilbur couldn’t help but grin.

“I think I will too.”

Suddenly, there was a warm *real* weight on his shoulder, and Wilbur glanced down to see Tommy slumping dramatically against him. “Guess we’re both stuck here for a while, Big W.” His panic from earlier seemed to have disappeared, and was now replaced with tired acceptance.

Reaching down, Wilbur ruffled Tommy’s hair. “Seems like we are, gremlin child.”

This seemed to send Tommy off as he dove into a tirade about how he wasn’t a child, letting out a string of curses that Wilbur couldn’t help but laugh at.

Maybe there was a literal bounty on his head, but all he could do right now was trust in Clara’s guidance, and see where She wanted him to go from here.

Plus, with Tommy by his side, maybe it wouldn’t be all that bad.

Chapter End Notes

now it might seem odd to end this one on the note of "they have bounties on their heads" but hey what can ya do kldjsfkldsf

but yes this is the end of someone else's dream! I'll probably add another one shot or two to this series in the near future because I have a lot of ideas for this, but I don't want to make it one big fic bc I don't have a single cohesive narrative in mind. just a bunch of tiny moments. so make sure to subscribe to the sleepyhead series for that!

ty all sm again for the love on this, I really hope you guys enjoyed what I came up with and the details I've included for all the characters! also word of note: not everyone's cybernetics were mentioned because this is wilbur's POV, and he just mentions things he can see. that's why there might be a few details that seem confusing or random, because it's referencing other implants that Wilbur doesn't know about. Tubbo, for example, has more cybernetics than just his eye, so if I end up writing more you'll definitely find out more about that

anyway hope you guys enjoyed! in case you didn't know I have a discord server for my fics so make sure to go hop in if you wanna talk about my work
<https://discord.gg/HF4z3SqUgE>

also again here's the playlist link for this au if you wanna check it out [here](#)

ok that's all for now! please leave a comment if you enjoyed, I don't respond to most but I read them all and they really make my day <3

hmu on tumblr and twitter @bonesandthebees

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!